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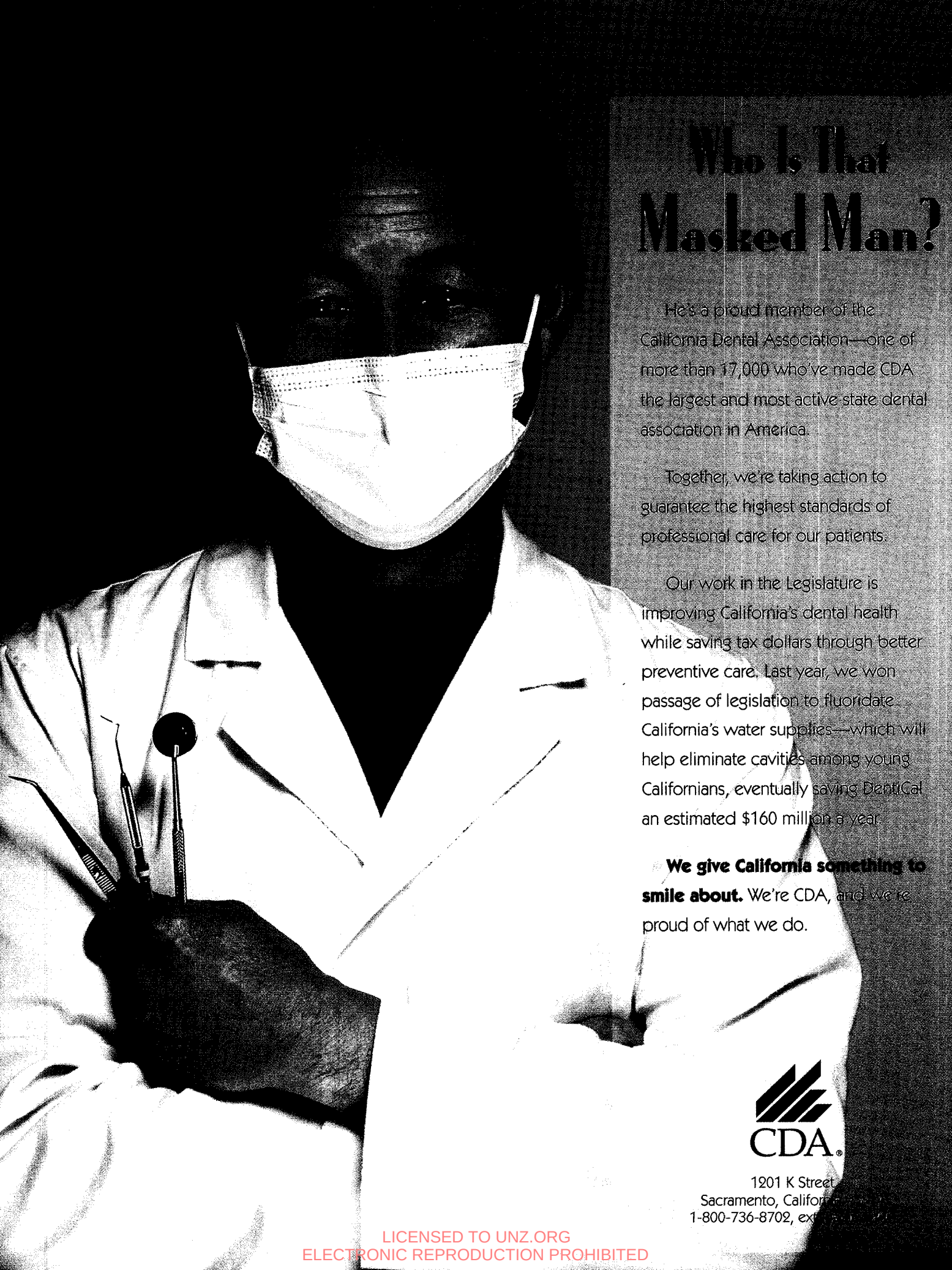

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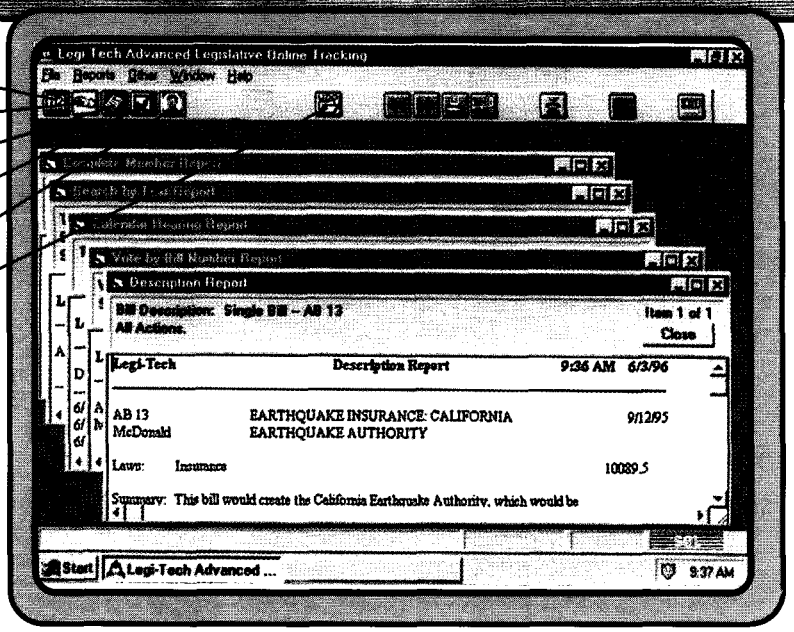

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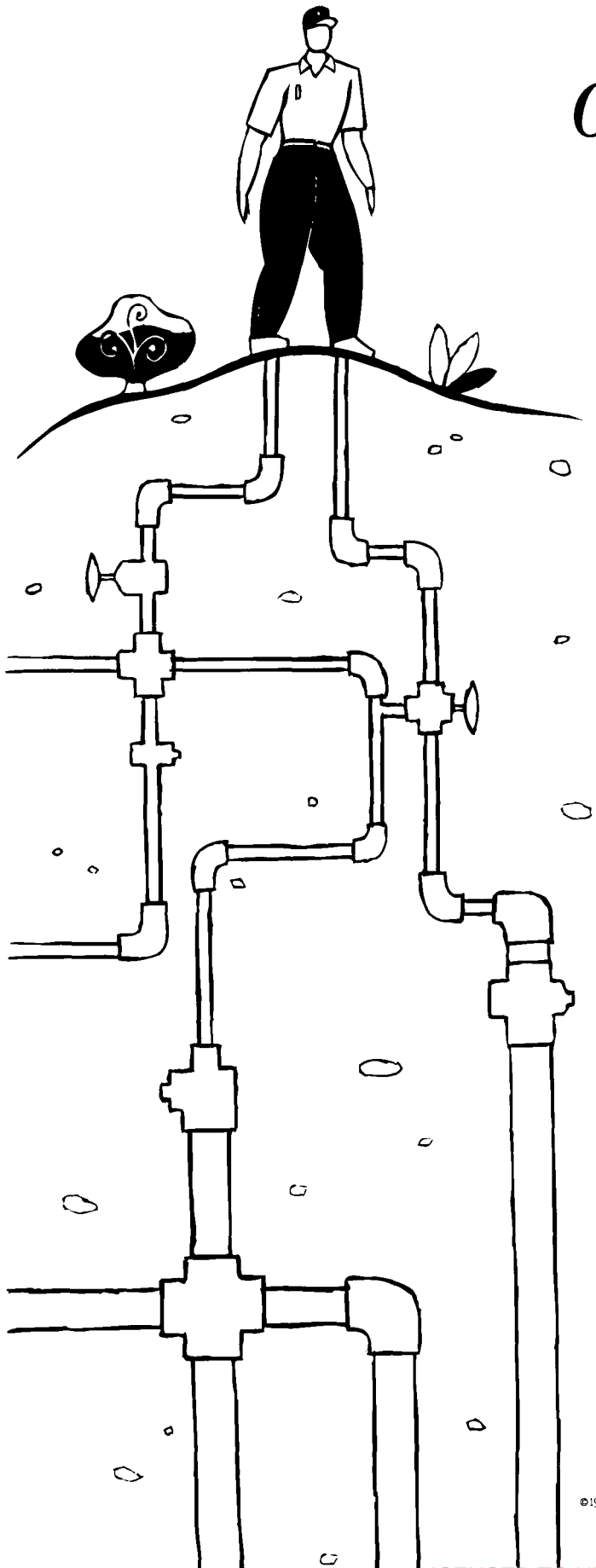

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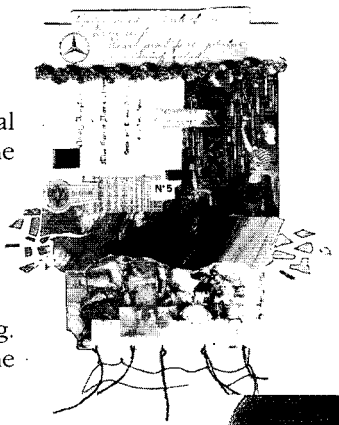

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Upfront
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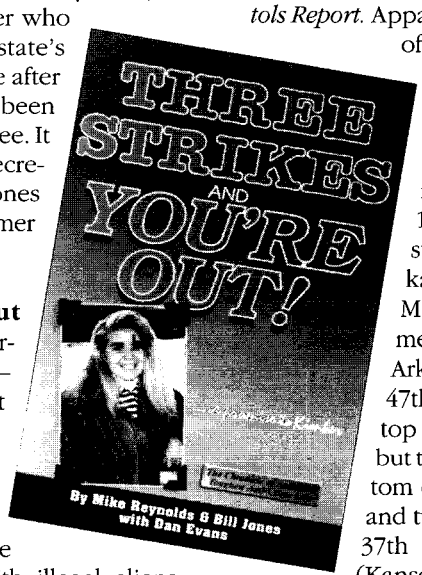
Summer reading. Two new books you might want to take note of, if you have a spare moment or two for summer reading. Former state Senator H.L. Richardson recently published a novel called "Split Ticket." According to a blurb on the back cover, it's "a hilarious, fast-paced tale of politics gone bonkers ..." Well, H.L. ought to know. There is nothing hilarious about the second book — "Three Strikes and You're Out!" by Mike Reynolds, the Fresno photographer who spearheaded the state's three-strikes crusade after his daughter had been murdered by a parolee. It is co-authored by Secretary of State Bill Jones and Dan Evans, a former Jones staffer.



How about Dred Scott? California went to court — federal court — last month to plead its case for $2.4 billion in money from the feds for what the state claims are the costs associated with illegal aliens. The state is claiming that the feds have failed to control the flow of illegals, thus adversely impacting California. Federal appellate courts recently have dismissed similar appeals on behalf of New York and Florida, but Governor Pete Wilson remains optimistic that California will prevail. Still, the state's legal reasoning seems a bit odd. Referring to the influx of illegals as an "invasion," the state cited an 1889 Supreme Court ruling that upheld a law that banned Chinese laborers, comparing them, too, to an invasion. Now, we understand the importance of precedent in making a case for your argument, but it seems that sinking the pilings of your appeal into what charitably has been described as an old "coolie law" might create a shaky foundation. And if California does prevail based on this argument, then the door could swing wide open for other states to demand money as compensation for having to deal with an invasion of, say, Californians. Take Idaho, for instance, which has complained for years that its pristine way of life has been permanently damaged by immigrants from Los Angeles.

Wal-Mart factor. Comes this from our sister publication, *State Capitols Report.* Apparently, a state's quality of life, as indicated in the "Rating Guide to Life in America's Fifty States," is inversely proportionate to how many Wal-Marts per 100,000 exist in that state. For example, Arkansas is first on the Wal-Mart chart, with 3.14 megastores per 100,000 Arkansans. Arkansas ranks 47th in the Guide. Of the top 10 Wal-Mart states, all but three wallow at the bottom of the Guide rankings, and two of those three rank 37th (Missouri) and 32nd (Kansas), respectively. Seven of the bottom 10 Wal-Mart states rank in the top 10 Guide states, with the top Guide state — Vermont — ranked 50th among Wal-Marters. California ranks 44th on the Wal-Mart chart, 10th on the Guide chart.

Block-grant boondoggle. The Washington, D.C.-based Center of Budget and Policy Priorities last month issued the results of a study listing the winners and losers under proposed GOP Medicaid legislation now under consideration in Congress. The center evaluated four different Medicaid proposals to see how each state fared in Medicaid spending per state resident, per elderly resident, per poor resident and per Medicaid beneficiary. And the news doesn't seem to be good for California, which ranks 49th in federal payments per poor resident and per Medicaid beneficiary. By contrast, California has one of the highest poverty rates and thus one of the greatest needs for federal assistance. And although some states would receive more than $4000 per Medicaid beneficiary, California is one of seven states to get less than $2500 per beneficiary. And when it comes to Medicaid payments per poor resident, California would get only $2193 — 70 percent of the national average. The only state to get less would be Nevada, at $1919. New Hampshire, on the other hand, would receive $6244 per poor resident — 200 percent of the national average. The Center bills itself as a "nonpartisan research organization and policy institute ... supported by foundation grants."

Move over, Kramer. TV's wackiest neighbor is about to be dethroned. No longer will "Seinfeld's" Cosmo Kramer be considered the guy you'd most love to see run over by a delivery truck, not if plans for a new Al Franken sit-com get off the ground. Franken will portray a D.C.-based newsman who reports for a show patterned after "Nightline." And his next-door neighbor? According to the *Orange County Register*, the neighbor will be Bob Dornan, who will portray himself and even write his own lines. Following in the illustrious footsteps of Harry Morgan ("December Bride") and Michael Richards ("Seinfeld"), Dornan will blaze new trails in neighbordom. The multi-term GOP congressman said his only concern is becoming the butt of every Franken joke. For our part, it's a nice fit. The guy who often substitutes for Rush Limbaugh paired with the guy who wrote "Rush Limbaugh Is A Big Fat Idiot."

Profile in Courage. Assemblywoman Susan Davis (D-San Diego) recently found herself between a rock and a hard place on a bill (AB 2167) to take $87 million in property tax money away from San Francisco and spread it around to other cities and counties. One of the

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places slated to benefit from the transfer was San Diego, which stood to gain $13 million in extra revenue. That dilemma apparently was too much for Davis who, according to the *San Diego Union-Tribune*, cast two votes for the bill and two votes against it. Of course, the only vote that really counts is the last one — and Davis is recorded as a "yes." But her route to that decision is curious, if less than courageous. Her first floor vote was "yes." But when the bill was brought up on reconsideration three days later, Davis switched to "no." It remained "no" after a call was lifted, although the measure eventually passed. Then, after the house had adjourned, Davis changed her final vote to "yes." An aide told the *Union-Trib* that Davis' "no" votes were mistakes. So, even though Davis has been a legislator for several years now, she still confuses the red and green buttons at her desk? Is that what her office wants us to swallow?

Spitting match. Two of Northern California's premier newspapers spit at each other last month over a couple of issues affecting Sacramento — Auburn Dam and a ballpark authority. The *San Francisco Chronicle* opined that both the dam and ballpark were bad ideas. The *Chron* didn't like the ballpark because — let's face it — the primary tenant on the horizon is the Oakland Athletics, who has been treated miserably by its current landlord — the Oakland-Alameda County Coliseum Commission. The commission turned itself inside-out to accomodate the Oakland Raiders and its owner, Al Davis, with renovations that made the Coliseum a work-in-progress for this entire baseball season. And the *Chron* didn't like the dam because it might put a lot of pristine canyonland under water. *The Sacramento Bee* responded quickly, grumping on its editorial page that the *Chron* had based both of its missives on inaccurate data. What *The Bee* didn't point out, and what we would like to add to the proceedings, is that when it comes to flooding canyonland, nobody — nobody — beats San Francisco. After all, John Muir considered Hetch Hetchy the most beautiful spot in all California, more lovely even than its neighbor — Yosemite. Hetch Hetchy, of course, is under water thanks to a dam built to supply San Francisco.

Affirmative action. The *San Francisco Chronicle* last month identified 84 of Northern California's leading corporate executives — ranking them according to compensation. Top of the list: Richard Rosenberg, chairman, president and CEO of BankAmerica, whose compensation package was just shy of $12 million — a 235 percent increase over the previous year. Number two: also from BankAmerica, vice chairman and CFO Lewis Coleman, who earned just over $11 million — 525 percent more than the previous year. In fact, five of the top 10 work for BankAmerica — and all had increases of 200 percent or more. And so it went throughout the list, a parade of white males interrupted only by Komag Chairman Tu Chen, who ranked 49th, and GAP executive veep Magdalene Gross, who came in 69th. Only nine of the 84 earned less money in '95 than in '94. By contrast, 20 of the 84 enjoyed increases of better than 100 percent.

Correction. Last month, in our article on Assembly races, we mixed a couple of apples and oranges. We indicated that former GOP Assemblyman Paul Zeltner had won his seat by defeating an African-American Democrat — Ed Waters, son of Representative Maxine Waters (D-Los Angeles) in a district with 67 percent Democratic registration. True enough. Unfortunately, we went on to say that Zeltner was in turn beaten two years later by Democrat Bob Epple, who is white. Actually, Zeltner was beaten by Democrat Willard Murray Jr., who also is African-American.

Come across a blurb lately that's nosy, newsy or smart-alecky about California government, politics or politicians? Share it with the Journal. *We pay up to $25 for entertainment tidbits published in "Up Front." So rush your items to Up Front, 2101 K Street, Sacramento CA 95816. Sorry, submissions cannot be returned.*

"Patrick Henry should come back to see what taxation with representation is like."

— Anonymous

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Defining Fa

Once the province of religious conservatives, "family values" have become 1996's bi-partisan mantra. Have political agendas sucked the meaning from the phrase? And what place do politics — and politicians — have in the discourse?

By Steve Scott

Consider the following two match-ups in what is, technically, still a hypothetical presidential contest. The names are omitted, but it won't be hard to figure them out. There will be a quiz afterward.

Contest One involves a middle-aged sharpie with an eye for the ladies. His first campaign was almost wrecked by accusations from one alleged peccadillo, and he is facing sexual harassment charges from another alleged liaison. He dodged the draft, blows with the political winds, and addresses moral and ethical concerns only in election years. His opponent, a war hero, is the straightest of arrows, born and raised in the heartland. He opposes abortion and took the lead in chastising Hollywood for the

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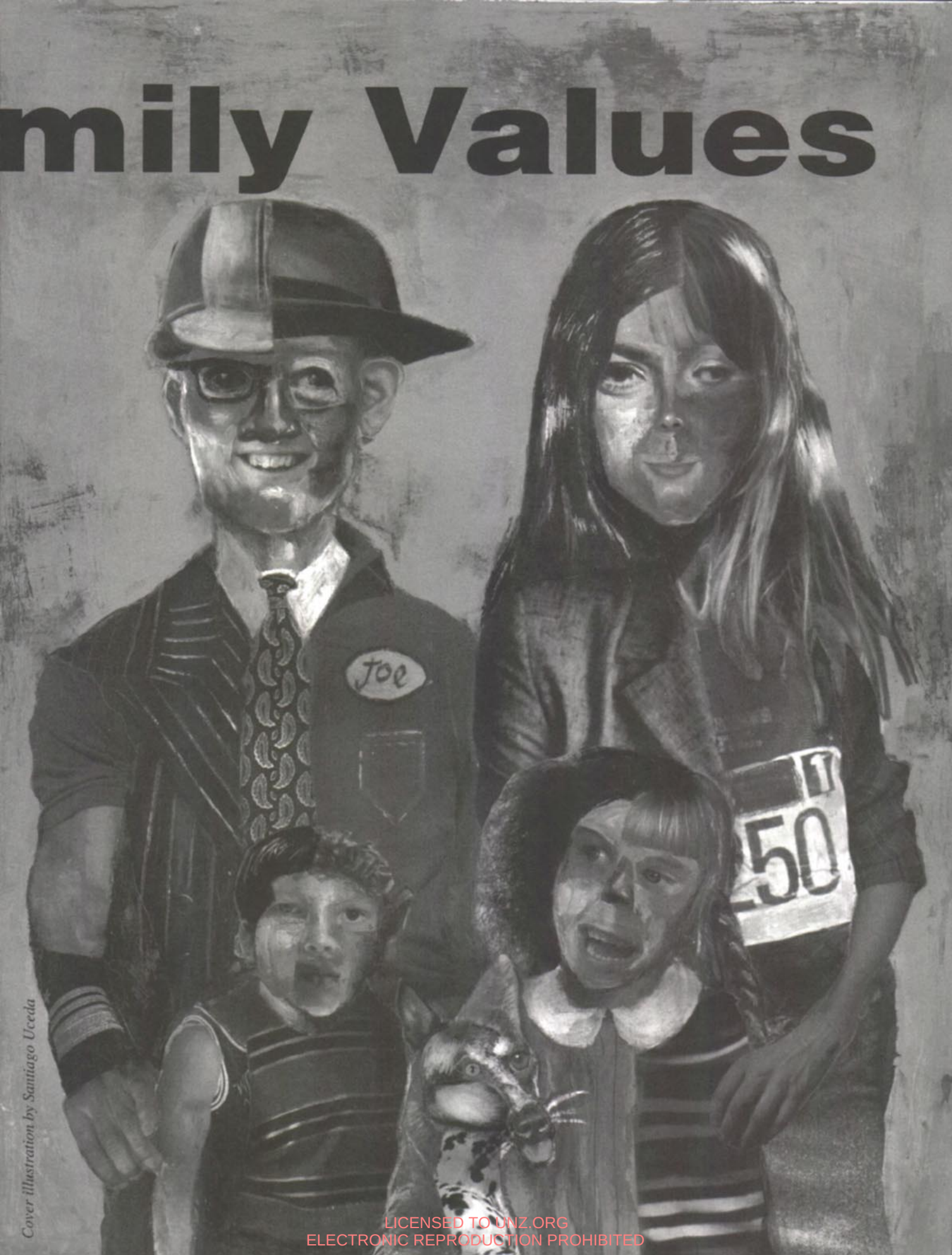

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Like fingerprints, no two sets of family values are exactly alike.

moral content of its product. No one has ever hinted that he cheats on his wife.

Contest Two involves another man of humble beginnings. He fought through the torture of a dysfunctional family to become a success, and has been married to the same woman for nearly half his life. He ignored political critics by enrolling his teenage daughter in private school, and has supported tax breaks, family leave, and a boost in the minimum wage. His opponent is the ultimate Washington insider, having spent about half of his much longer life in Congress. He's on his second wife (also a Washington insider) after having divorced his first wife as his career began to rise. He opposes family leave, grumbles about boosting the minimum wage, and has taken thousands of dollars in campaign contributions from tobacco and alcohol companies.

So it's not that tough to identify the principals — Bill Clinton and Bob Dole — in each of the above anonymous contests. But that's not the quiz question. The real poser is this: In each of the two scenarios, which is the candidate of "family values?" Select one set of standards, and Clinton is the family man, hands down. Choose another set of criteria, and Dole is the obvious choice. Opt for a third set, and you could paint both as enemies of the family unit. Such is the vexing conundrum at the eye of the current political discourse over morality and values.

Like fingerprints, no two sets of family values are exactly alike. Even those who take their values verbatim from the precepts of a particular faith vary from person to person in their interpretation of those values, and most especially in their ability to live by them. Yet, despite the often-personal nature of their expression, "family values" has somehow managed to become the catchphrase of the 1996 campaign. President Clinton and Senator Dole trip over their teleprompters in the haste to cast themselves as guardians of the family unit. House Democrats, under the leadership of Representative Richard Gephardt (D-Missouri) used working-class families as the cornerstone of their response to the GOP's "Contract with America." Even California Governor Pete Wilson, long the archetype of the pragmatic, business-oriented conservative, last year reinvented himself as the savior of the institution of fatherhood.

All sense an unease in the citizenry about the state of the family as an institution. Family researcher Arlene Skolnick proclaimed the modern American family "an embattled paradise," and to see why, one need only do the math. Nationally, and in California, roughly two out of every five first marriages ends in divorce. The National Center for Health Statistics reports more than half of the 1.2 million divorces per year are in homes with one or more children under 18. According to the California Department of Social Services, 35 percent of children each year in the state are born to unwed mothers. Statewide, some 1.3 million children live in poverty. While the crime rate is dropping, millions of families each year continue to be rent asunder by substance abuse, family violence, and simple neglect.

Beyond the numbers lay the social and cultural influences which blow even more blooms off the family rose. Between salacious soaps and high-decibel talk shows, daytime television has become a veritable "Dysfunctions 'R Us." You say you only read the newspaper? Well, Los Angeles' two front-page murder trials last year both involved people accused of murdering family members. "Most Americans are really afraid of the direction we're going," said Eloise Anderson, director of the state Department of Social Services. Anderson believes it is this fear, as much as anything, that drives the urge to reconnect with "family values."

"What I hear Americans saying when they talk about this family thing is, ' I want to be where it's safe,'" said Anderson. "I want to be where I know what's going to happen tomorrow when I wake up."

What Anderson hears in the phrase "family values" is different from what rings in the ears of many across the political spectrum. Indeed, the lack of a clear definition of what is meant by "family values" is what has allowed an idea seemingly rooted in the private dominion of home and hearth to find its way into the fire and brimstone world of partisan politics. By most accounts, the phrase is used most often by social conservatives, especially those on what has come to be known as the "Religious Right." In any number of individual manifestos, social conservatives have sought to weave their political positions into the tapestry of self-evident, universal "truths." These "truths" include everything from opposition to abortion and gay rights to welfare reform to tax relief to prayer in schools. The view from the left is that groups such as the Christian Coalition, Focus on the Family, and the Family Research Council aim to bend the definition of "values" to fit their political agenda.

"It's the conservative political agenda ... mapped onto the Bible," said University of California, Berkeley, linguistics professor George Lakoff. "The Christian Coalition is well organized, and it understands how its theology fits its politics."

While they don't deny initiating the recent public discourse about values, social conservatives maintain their ideas have resonated as a reaction to decades of "moral relativism." The view from the right is that liberals and their apologists in Washington have been bending definitions and creating a political lexicon openly hostile to religion, families, and conservatism. The consequences of this hostility, say conservatives, is a society which lives for the moment, accepting once-taboo conventions like divorce and abortion

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as simple lifestyle choices.

"Nothing short of a great Civil War of Values rages today throughout North America," wrote Focus on the Family president James Dobson, in the 1990 book *Children At Risk*. "Instead of fighting for territory or military conquest ... the struggle now is for the hearts and minds of the people."

As with other such philosophical "wars," many of the seeds of the conflict were planted in the cracked earth of the Golden State. California has been the vanguard for many of the societal changes conservatives find most offensive to their concept of family values. As far back as 1966, Californians elected a divorced ex-movie actor with what we now call a "blended family" as governor. California was the first with legal abortion, domestic partnership ordinances, and among the first to extend anti-discrimination protection to gays and lesbians. Perhaps most significant for family harmony, California enacted the first "no fault" divorce laws, which allowed couples to end their marriages. Critics say this move alone unleashed a torrent of divorces of convenience that diminished the sanctity of marriage.

"A lot of people say, 'Well, I'm not really happy so I'm splitting,'" said family therapist S. Bruce Narramore, a psychology professor at Biola University in La Mirada. "They could make the marriage work if they would spend the time, but instead people just say, 'I'm out of here.'"

No matter where and how family values became a part of the national debate, there is still a lack of a clear consensus about what the term really means. To see the dilemma, one need only de-construct the expression. "Family", for example, is generally defined as a group of people bound together by marriage, birth or adoption. Sounds reasonable enough, right? Single parents, blended families, even children adopted by gay or lesbian couples fit in the broad definition of a "family". This definition, however, satisfies few who paint their politics with bold strokes, whether on the left or the right. Religious conservatives modify the word family with the word "traditional," thus narrowing the definition to encompass only families with a mother and a father, preferably with the mother staying at home with the

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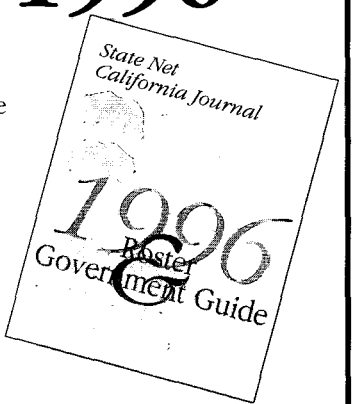

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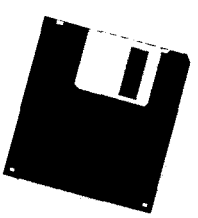

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The notion of a faith-based value system is hardly exclusive to the Christian Coalition.

kids. Liberals believe the definition should broaden so that legal family rights can be accorded to non-traditional arrangements, such as unmarried cohabitation or gay lovers.

"Values" is an even harder concept to handle. The notion of a faith-based value system is hardly exclusive to the Christian Coalition; most every religion in the world involves dissemination of some set of guiding principles. But here again, the issue is not so much who is included as who is excluded. Religious conservatives talk about "Judeo-Christian" values, implying adherence to both the Old and New Testaments of the Bible. Many Jewish leaders contend this definition is intended either to lump them in with Christian beliefs which they don't hold, or worse, to exclude and marginalize them altogether. In fact, the harshest critics of social conservatives see the very phrase "family values" as a code phrase implying the exclusion of Jews and African Americans.

"[Family values] is one of these empty phrases of political rhetoric that catches people at a moment when everyone thinks that things are up in the air," said UC-Berkeley sociologist Lillian Rubin. "Much of this stuff is coded ways of speaking about race in America, and what's going on in black families."

Conservatives deny their rhetoric is intended to exclude blacks or persons of other faiths. They argue that it is their critics on the left who have a much larger blind spot, which prevents them from accepting any reference to religion. Whatever one may think of them, argue conservatives, Judeo-Christian principles are woven into the fabric of the nation's founding documents, and political speeches throughout the nation's history are replete with biblical references. Many conservatives say liberals' veneration of the separation of church and state has resulted in the systematic expurgation of religion from the nation's history books.

"If you have a society that has no faith, no belief that there is a God up there bigger than us, you ultimately are going to end up with a society with no place to turn to anchor itself," said Professor Narramore of Biola University. "Faith in God is essential as a centering not only for individuals, but for families and society."

Ironically, even as they do battle over the role of "values" in political discourse, the ethos which compels liberals and conservatives to express their passions often springs from values both share. A liberal environmentalist who pedals to government meetings, runs a new-age bookstore, and makes her own organic baby food is certainly exhibiting the traits of self-reliance, enterprise, and commitment to family prized by conservatives. Likewise, an abortion-rights protester who organizes rallies, writes letters, and contributes time to local adoption agencies is demonstrating the sort of commitment, passion, and caring liberals like to associate with themselves.

According to scholars on both sides of the fence, the differences that inflame the family values debate seem to have less to do with the values themselves than where they are on an individual's priority list. For conservatives, the emphasis is on discipline, self-reliance and well-defined behavioral limits, with punishment for exceeding those limits. UC-Berkeley's George Lakoff calls this the "Strict Father" value system. Liberals often embrace some of those precepts, but their emphasis is more likely to be on fairness, personal development and empathy for others. This Lakoff has dubbed the "Nurturant Parent" model. Most people, he says, exhibit elements of each, but what conservatives have that liberals don't is an understanding of the connection between their values and their politics. Lakoff, himself a liberal, says liberals have neglected their own values in pursuit of economic equity.

"[Liberals] need to take the morality and family issues very seriously," said Lakoff. "Conservatives have created a language to express their views. Liberals have to do the same thing."

But if Lakoff is correct, and family values are the product of a particular world view, then the language of liberals or conservatives will have little currency for most of us. The place we will be obliged to search out "family values" is within the home. There, people across the spectrum agree, the simplest values are the most powerful—honesty, respect, communication, unconditional love — the Golden Rule. "I think of duty, sacrifice ... putting somebody else before me," mused Eloise Anderson. "People coming together around each other to support each other ... for the long haul."

These values are less oriented toward reshaping families the way they ought to be and more concerned with helping families with the day-to-day business of living together without resentment. "I don't spend my life trying to figure out what should be," said Dr. John Platt, a family counselor and author of a humorous parenting manual, *Life in the Family Zoo*. "I try to figure out what we're going to do about it." Platt, who consults with Sacramento County's Elk Grove Unified School District, charts something of a centrist course between the disciplinarian conservative view and the permissive liberal one, with each family member having responsibility and choices within clearly defined limits.

"Just the value of good old 'do unto others,'" said Platt. "All that is a part of a value system of mutual respect and responsibility."

Those on both sides toiling in the public "culture war" might do well to consider these more personal precepts as they fight their battles over the great social issues of the day. While they probably wouldn't bring peace in the "Civil War of Values," these real "family values" might just make the noise a little more bearable.

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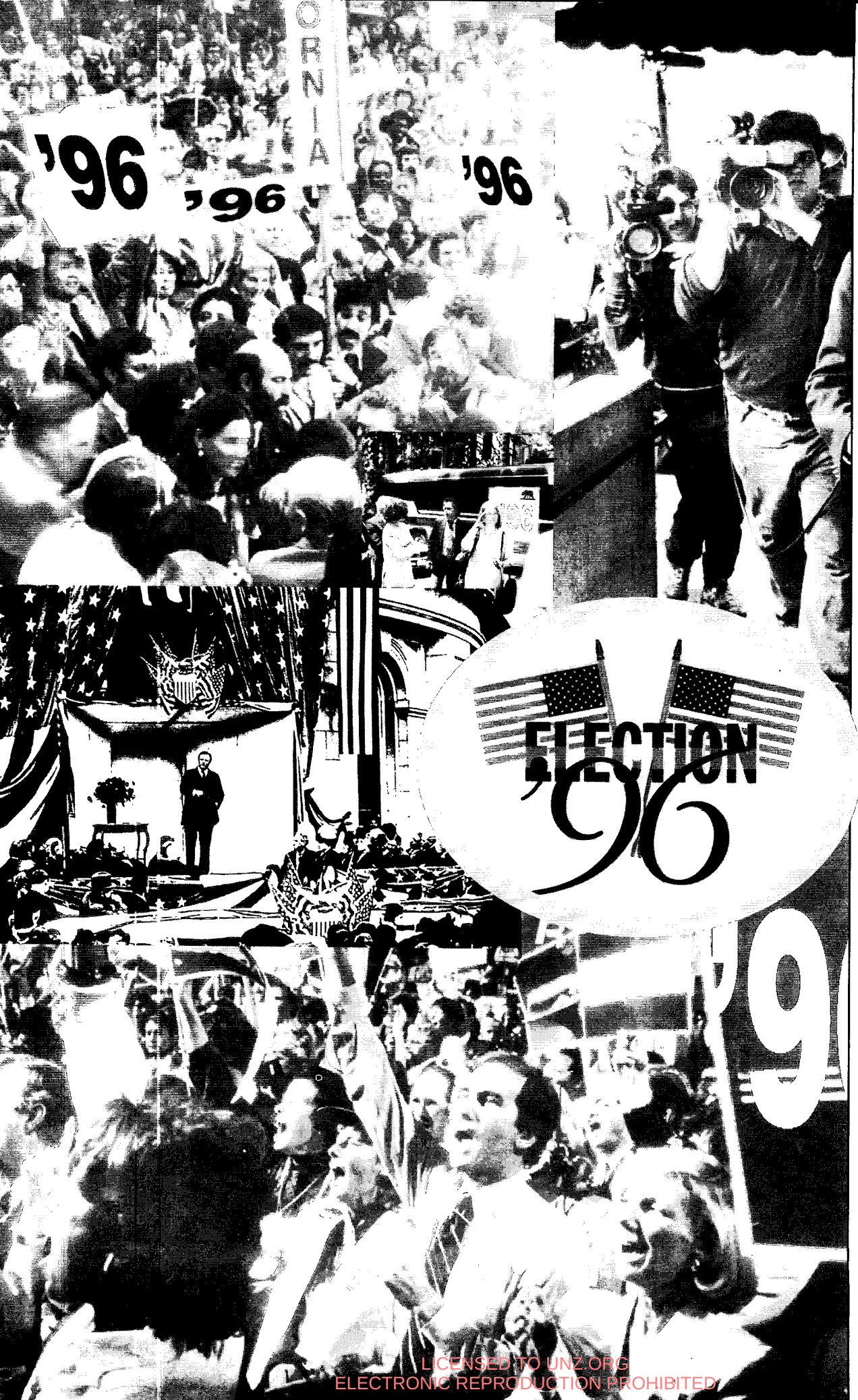

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The Bottom Line

government finance

by Susan Rasky

Quake Insurance Quagmire

One of the underrated options of public policymaking is an informed decision to do nothing. That will be cold comfort for the thousands (perhaps tens of thousands, nobody really has a reliable estimate) of Californians having difficulty obtaining earthquake and/or homeowners insurance and looking to Sacramento for help. But it may be the wisest course in weathering the "insurance crisis" supposedly looming in this earthquake-prone state.

It's not as if the Legislature has been inattentive. A decade ago, lawmakers adopted a requirement that insurers who write homeowners policies also must offer customers earthquake insurance. Insurance companies supported that linkage and in return were relieved of the traditional obligation to pay claims arising from multiple causes where at least one cause is covered under the homeowner's policy, even though another — earthquakes — is excluded.

In retrospect, the required linking of homeowners and earthquake insurance probably was a bad idea for consumers, distorting the homeowners market in favor of big companies who have exclusive insurance agents and preventing smaller companies from developing business in a separate earthquake insurance market. Lawmakers have spent the better part of the past two years trying to placate major insurers who are threatening to abandon the homeowners market because writing earthquake policies upsets their actuarial tables. As it happens, all kinds of things upset the orderly world of risk averse (and highly profitable) insurance companies — hurricanes in Florida, hail in Texas, war in Bosnia. So while the proximate cause of the current crisis is the 1994 Northridge Quake, which indeed played havoc with the finances of some smaller, overexposed companies in the San Fernando Valley, major insurance companies had been cutting back in California and other states well before that.

A manufactured crisis? At some level certainly. But the perception of crisis is what matters in both politics and public policy, and the perception didn't improve when Insurance Commissioner Charles Quackenbush shut down the state's FAIR plan, an insurance pool that issued very basic and very expensive property coverage to consumers in inner-city and fire-prone neighborhoods who were unable to purchase insurance in the private market.

In the face of these enormous cross pressures from insurers, consumer groups, realtors and Quackenbush, the Senate has thus far managed to resist a "solution" that promises to be far worse than the underlying problem — a publicly run earthquake insurance company known as the California Earthquake Authority. Under the best of circumstances, the CEA is a dubious, market-distorting venture that would never adequately cover homeowners in a major disaster. In the version approved by the Assembly last month, the CEA is a multi-billion dollar gift to the three major insurance companies — State Farm, Allstate and Farmers — who control a lion's share of the homeowners market in California, allowing them to dump their undesirable earthquake risk without any guarantee of resuming the underwriting of homeowners' policies.

Earthquake premiums would be high relative to the bare bones coverage, and consumers would be on the hook for policy surcharges and only partial payment of claims in the event the undercapitalized fund actually had to cover losses from even a moderate quake in the next few years.

If the macropolitics of earthquake insurance are complicated, the micropolitics are Byzantine, especially when the insurance industry is shoveling campaign money into the coffers of its legislative allies. Indeed, lest anyone be confused, the Senate's rejection of the CEA plan adopted in the Assembly was not exactly an act of pure political courage. Senate opponents have been helped along by the big three insurance companies who badly overplayed their hand in dictating the design of the CEA and by the clumsy — some would say arrogant — manner in which the measure's key authors, Senator Charles Calderon (D-Montebello) and Assemblyman David Knowles (R-Cameron Park) have handled the drafting.

Calderon, long a beneficiary of insurance money, in particular didn't aid his cause by signing off on a conference report that gutted the pet amendments of two key Senate Insurance Committee members — Senators Steve Peace (D-Chula Vista) and Pat Johnston (D-Stockton) — and the Senate President pro Tempore, Bill Lockyer of Hayward.

Lockyer and Peace, despite their opposition to the Calderon measure, appear to have other agendas in motion that may yet result in adoption of something similar to it. Peace is busy with a measure that would undo the revision in auto-insurance rate setting mandated by Proposition 103, and Lockyer, perhaps with an eye to those deep insurance industry pockets, has suggested that a little "tweaking" of the CEA proposal might eventually make it acceptable.

With less than a month remaining in the legislative session, tweaking is probably all that can be accomplished. That may be enough to convince a frightened, befuddled public that a crisis has been averted. But it's a safe bet that whatever the quick fix turns out to be, the seeds of the next insurance crisis will be imbedded in it.

The real solution for a national insurance industry is a national catastrophic policy that spreads the risk for floods and hurricanes and earthquakes across this vast country and as a result would cost consumers a tiny fraction of what they can expect to pay for coverage against the natural perils of their particular regions.

Until public policy advances that far, "doing nothing" still looks like a more attractive option.

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Fear of

By all accounts, the nation's economy is booming along. But not everyone is sharing in the largess. The "middle class" — that ill-defined sector that once provided the foundation of America's economy — seems to be slipping farther behind those at the top of the scale of wealth.

John Borland

These are times of plenty. Who can deny it? Unemployment is low. The stock market has risen to levels once reserved for astronauts, new multi million-dollar companies are being born overnight, and even tottering old Detroit-style giants are making money hand over fist. Vendors of luxury vehicles are having an astonishing year. The economy is positively glittering.

And the shine is not wholly that of costume jewelry. In California, one of the states hardest hit by the end of the Cold War and the recent recession, the economy has shifted more or less successfully to a focus on high-tech industry, exports to Asian markets and entertainment. One of the biggest problems facing state budget-makers this year was figuring out how to spend revenues that exceeded their early estimates.

So where do the hints of "funk" — as President Bill Clinton once termed it — come from?

Figures recently released by the U.S Census Bureau provide a hint. According to the bureau's annual survey of income, nearly half of all the nation's income dollars went to the top fifth of earners in 1994. The wealthiest 5 percent were sitting pretty with a 21 percent share. The bottom 60 percent of all wage earners, by contrast, earned barely 27 percent of the national pie. This was the most unequal income distribution in half a century — a trend that has been climbing since the early 1970s and has continued unabated through Republican and Democratic administrations.

If the rising tide, as some nautical-minded optimists like to say, was in fact lifting all boats — if low wages were in fact growing, just more slowly than high-end salaries — then rowboats and yachts alike could pop champagne corks together. But this is not the case. Real wages, particularly those of low-skilled, high-school educated workers, have been falling steadily for two decades despite an impressive gain in June 1996. "There's a definite

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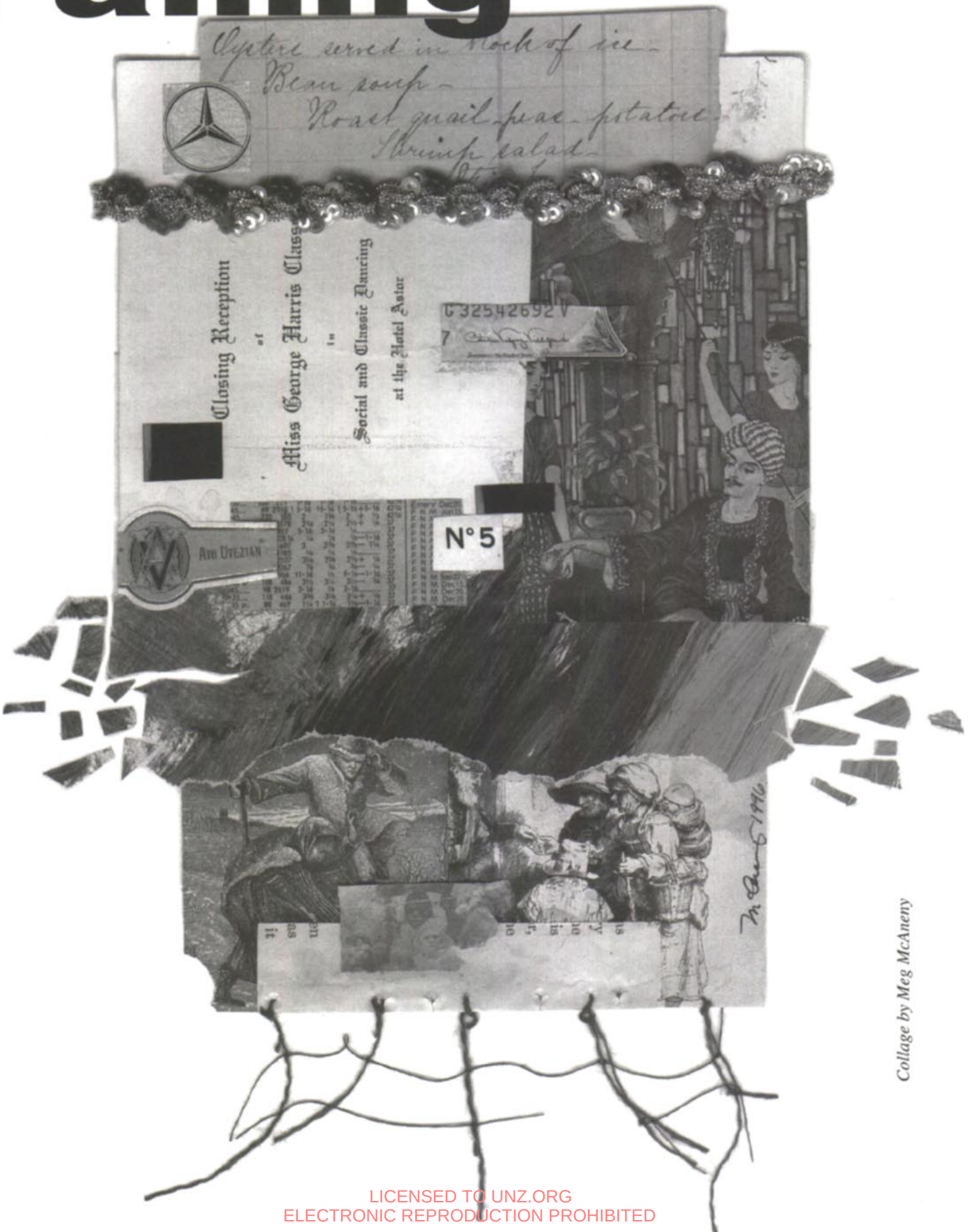
Falling



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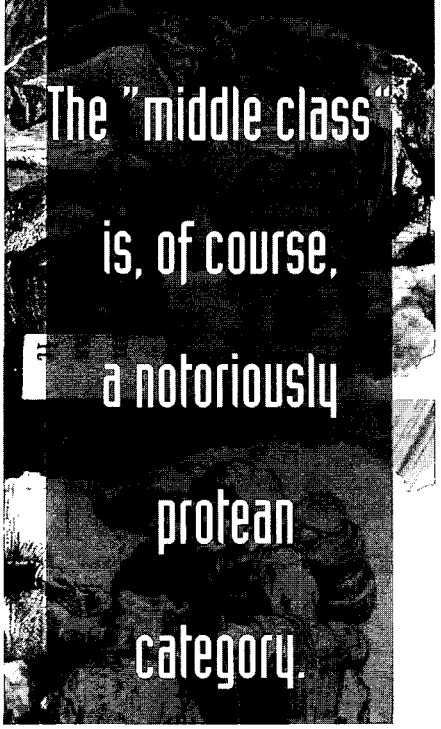
bifurcation in the work force," says Clair Brown, director of the University of California, Berkeley, Institute of Industrial Relations.

These warning signs and the forces within the economy that they represent, are bad news for workers not in the upper third of the economic stratum. Young people starting families are less able to find the decent-paying jobs that lead to a home, a car, a comfortable life in the middle class. Two-income families have fewer difficulties, but face other stresses. Middle-class families are on an economic treadmill that has been speeding up over the past quarter-century, and many are finding themselves unable to push ahead any faster.

The "middle class" is, of course, a notoriously protean category. When Washington tried to target this group with tax cuts last year, Clinton set its upper income boundary at $75,000 per year, while some Republicans went as high as $200,000. Academic studies have ranged between the middle 40 percent and 80 percent of incomes, or have compared income to a household's financial needs. Still others assert that in the relatively classless United States, it is a matter of self-definition. Following this line, a recent nationwide *New York Times* poll found that 36 percent of respondents classified themselves as "middle" class, 55 percent as "working" class, 2 percent as "upper" and 6 percent as "lower."

It may be true that some fuzzily bounded demographic, perhaps somewhere in the middle 60 to 70 percent of incomes, has fueled the nation's high-consumption, politically stable post-World War II society. Call it the "comfortable class," located between those who sweat nervously from paycheck to paycheck and the lucky few for whom money troubles are as foreign as macaroni-and-cheese Thanksgivings. But this group is fractured today, and economic stresses are increasingly replacing complacency with anxiety.

One dividing line is that of age: the experience and expectations of the pre-Baby Boomers, the Boomers themselves, and the younger generation now in its 20's and early 30's are very different. The first group, and to a large extent the Boomers, grew into their working lives with justified expectations of working for one or two companies for the majority of their lifetimes, climbing steadily up the wage scale until they were comfortably ensconced in a secure, well-paying



position. The younger generation, by contrast, has little or no expectation of keeping a lifetime job. This provides more flexibility, certainly, and perhaps a faster psychological response to the now-common layoff, but it also reduces the sense of security so important to beginning a family .

Another fault line runs through education and skill levels. Since World War II there has been ample opportunity for low-skilled workers with only a high-school education to earn wages with which they could buy a house and car, and support a family. This is less and less true in the post Cold-War world — a staple complaint of populist rhetoric. The fact that expectations have not changed dramatically has driven skyrocketing levels of consumer debt.

Low- to medium-skilled workers are being squeezed by a confluence of forces, economists explain. First is a simple change in the demand for skills. Businesses need technically skilled employees even at the lowest levels. Snowballing advances in technology require workers' abilities to keep pace, while mechanization reduces the number of employees needed. Matching this is the increasingly globe-trotting nature of capital and companies. If Nike, for example, can produce its $140 shoes more cheaply in the Malaysian countryside, or Intel assemble its processors for a lower cost on mainland China, then off they go. While the net job-producing effects of such globalization are still being debated, it is certainly true that this decreases the bargaining power of unions in any industry that has the ability to pack up and move across borders.

In California, downward pressure on low wages is exacerbated by the influx of relatively unskilled immigrants, says Brown, who effectively bid wages down by swelling the labor pool. During most past waves of immigration, this has been a single-generation phenomenon. But she is not so sure about the present. "Some studies show that assimilation is not going well," she says, noting that this could perpetuate the drag on wages into another generation.

In the last decade, particularly over the downsizing-prone course of the recession, even the white-collar jobs undergirding the comfortable class have been at risk. Since 1979, 24.8 million blue-collar jobs have been lost, and 18.7 million white-collar jobs have followed with their numbers concentrated heavily after 1990. It is true that since the end of the recession, most have found some other work. "A lot of the stuff about the drop in job security is being pushed by white-collar workers," says Stanford economist John Pencavel. "In terms of the economy as a whole it is simply not true. But Pencavel does admit that most who find new jobs — particularly those who had high-paying managerial salaries — must take a cut in pay. U.S. Department of Labor figures show that an average worker losing a job between 1981 and 1983 had to settle for $65 per week less; even adjusting for inflation, that had risen to an $85 per week cut by 1994.

Women, who still lag behind the average salary for men, have been able to buck the trend of falling wages. Two income families are thus doing substantially better than the traditional stay-at-home mother model. The corollary of this is that most families must have two wage earners, often with one or both working more than one job, to maintain a middle-class standard of living. In 1994 more than 60 percent of all married couples had two incomes, up from 39 percent 25 years ago.

These forces present certain problems for families, particularly young people who wish to settle down and have children. Child care can range close to $1000 a month for two children, and even many two-income families find this difficult to afford. If the mother — or father — chooses to stay home, then the family income drops substantially. This may be acceptable for a family of professionals. It is not for those in the lower

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income brackets. "If we were to commit to national child care, we would probably reduce 25 percent of the stress on families," says Bill Blazek, a Sacramento marriage, family and child counselor.

And even a two-earner family does not necessarily provide for a comfortable, stable family life, notes Blazek. "Almost in any direction you want to look, people are making less money for more work than they did 10 or 20 years ago," he says. Wage-earners "come back with less of the energy that it takes to run a family. ...You can see the desperation that sets in."

A disturbing sidelight, notes Pencavel, is that some studies seem to show a growing tendency for young people to marry others of similar educational background. "What that means is that any wage inequality by schooling is compounded," he says. If the trend is real, and continues, he adds, then "it means that family income inequality is going to be greater than individual inequality."

Is it the government's place to do anything about these forces? Politicians wary of the populist vote tend to put these issues high on their list of rhetorical concerns. And so conservatives at the state and federal level have proposed family tax cuts and pro-business measures justified under the mantra of "job creation." Democrats have come out with a vague middle-class family version of 1994's GOP "Contract with America." Both parties are enthusiastically beating the drum of "traditional family values," a tactic that seems to many observers of the economic scene to miss the point (see story, page 8)..

"It's hard to talk about values when in some sections of the country you have 20 percent unemployment," says Lillian Rubin, a sociology professor at U.C. Berkeley's Institute for the Study of Social Change. 'In order to spend more time with your children you need to be able to feed them... We're the only country in the industrial world that does not have a decent family policy."

Many of the forces affecting wages and families come from outside government, though it is certainly government that propagates many of the rules by which the economy runs. "We know this is not an inexorable happening," says Pencavel, citing the opposite trends in the 1950s and 1960s. He notes that some forces, such as increasing college enrollments, are already acting as a counterbalance. And Hudson Institute economist John Weicher, a former Reagan administration official, points to recent Federal Reserve data he says shows that overall wealth patterns — measures of households' assets — are not growing more unequal, though this is a point of some debate among academics. "The people who own their own homes are about the same proportion now as in the 1980s," Weicher says. "In that sense, the middle class is right where it was."

Brown is less optimistic. "These are all forces I see as going to [persist]," she says. She adds forbodingly that in coming decades the probable implosion of Social Security and Medicare under the weight of the aging Baby Boomers will put even more pressures on younger working families. "We have a window of opportunity" to address these problems, she warns, saying that all are issues that could "tear the country apart."

"I worry about our young families," she says.

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Washington Notes

perspective

by Herbert A. Sample

Auburn Dam

It is common knowledge around California governmental and political circles that the state's congressional delegation hardly ever agrees on anything of significance. Want another example?

The latest is the Auburn Dam, that luckless proposal to build a huge flood-control and, eventually, water-supply facility on the American River about 35 miles northeast of Sacramento. Luckless because since the dam was originally authorized by Congress in the mid-1960s, it never has quite gotten off the ground. Earthquake worries halted preliminary construction 20 years ago. A Democrat-led House of Representatives squelched an attempt to revive it in 1992. And this past June, the Republican-controlled House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee put the kibosh on it.

So, where was the California delegation on this project deemed by advocates — which just happened to include two powerful House Democrats and a mid-level House GOP leader — to be of vital, life- and property-saving importance for the capital of the nation's most populous and richest state? As usual, it was all over the map.

The Auburn Dam highlighted the philosophic tensions that exist within the state and its congressional representatives. The storage, conveyance and use of water, and how the environment is impaired by that has long generated deep fissures among those lawmakers. The dam, by its very nature, easily brought those concerns to the fore.

Despite that history, the four Sacramento-area congressmen were bonded in bipartisan support for the dam. Republican John Doolittle of Rocklin, a House GOP deputy whip, was the dam's head cheerleader, backed by Republican Richard Pombo of Tracy and Democrats Robert Matsui of Sacramento and Vic Fazio of West Sacramento. Matsui is the national Democratic Party's deputy chairman and Fazio is the third-ranking Democrat in the House.

Theirs was a marriage of convenience, for conservatives Doolittle and Pombo rarely agree with the moderate-to-liberal Matsui and Fazio. Both duos needed something from the other. Doolittle and Pombo desired the increased water supply that a dam would provide their constituents, and they knew the support of the area's congressional Democrats was a must if they were to have any chance of winning House approval for the project. Matsui, on the other hand, wanted better flood protection for his constituents, and he needed the backing of the two GOP members to accomplish his goals in a Republican House. Fazio represents few residents threatened with flooding from the American River, but some of his constituents are farmers who generally support the idea of making more water available for agricultural use.

A few other Californians lined up behind the dam, such as Representative George Radanovich who, as president of the House GOP freshman class, was charged with talking to freshman Republicans on the committee. Democrat Gary Condit, a leader of conservative Democrats in the House, lobbied a couple of fellow "Blue Dog" Democrats on the panel. Democrat Calvin Dooley and Republicans Wally Herger and Howard McKeon also helped, as did Republican David Dreier, chairman on Newt Gingrich's California Task Force.

But California, of course, boasts 52 House members. Inevitably, some of them stray off the reservation. Representative George Miller Jr. (D-Pleasant Hill), a longtime champion of environmental causes, wrote letters to Democrats on the committee, urging them to oppose the project. Miller also forwarded to committee members a letter from Assemblyman Phil Isenberg (D-Sacramento) and Assembly Minority Leader Richard Katz (D-Sylmar) detailing their opposition. Less active, but equally critical of the dam, were several senior California Democrats — Howard Berman, Anthony Beilenson, Pete Stark, Ron Dellums and Henry Waxman. They joined as co-authors on rival legislation that would have blocked funding for the dam, as did Representative Tom Campbell of Saratoga, the most moderate California Republican.

The contentiousness of the dam proposal played havoc with the deliberations of some Californians on the transportation committee. Most notable was Long Beach Republican Steve Horn who, as a young aide on the staff of then-U.S. Senator Thomas Kuchel in the early 1960s, helped draft legislation authorizing the dam. Doolittle was counting on Horn to offer the dam proposal before the committee, hoping his history with the project would sway some members. But Horn wasn't swayed himself. He told a reporter he would vote for the dam in committee but reserved the right to vote "no" on the House floor. That was not exactly the rock-solid support Doolittle was seeeking, but Horn was looking over his shoulder at a re-election battle in which his Democratic opponent is likely to use environmental issues against him.

Representative Andrea Seastrand (R-Shell Beach), facing a tougher re-election fight, also was wary of how a vote for the dam would play in her environmentally conscious district. But she ended up voting for it. So did Representative Jay Kim (R-Diamond Bar), who worried how the dam's huge price tag — nearly $1 billion — would affect funding for a flood-control project that runs through his district. But Democrat Juanita Millender-McDonald, who joined Congress two months before the vote, voted "no" after being buffeted by Fazio on one side and environmentalists on the other.

The machinations of all these players points up just how tenuous the dam proposal was among California representatives, much less those from other states. And while the substantial split in the state's delegation certainly was not the decisive reason for the proposal's defeat, it did not help what was a problematic proposition from the start.

Herbert A. Sample is a reporter in the Washington, D.C., bureau of The Sacramento Bee.

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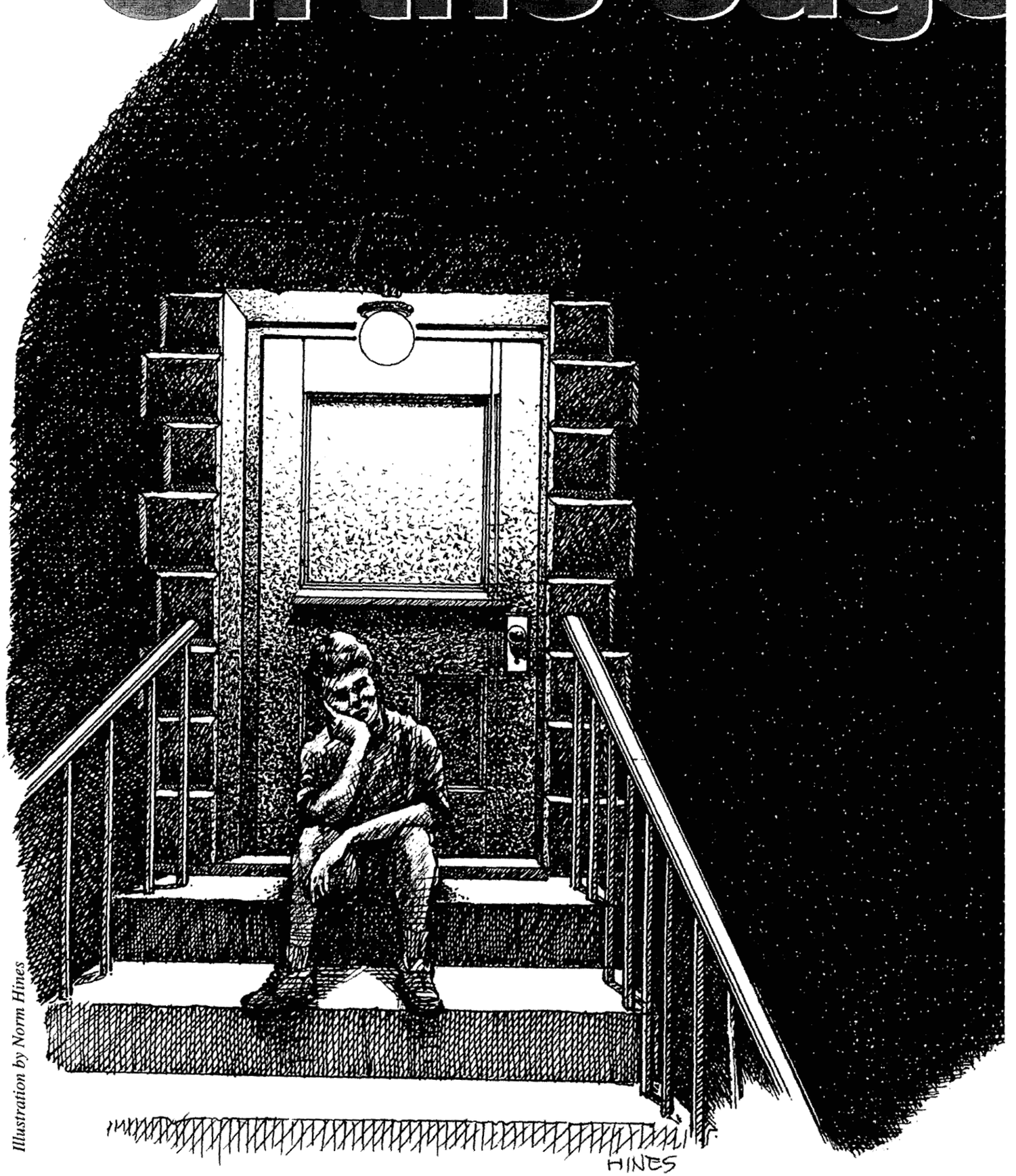
On the edge



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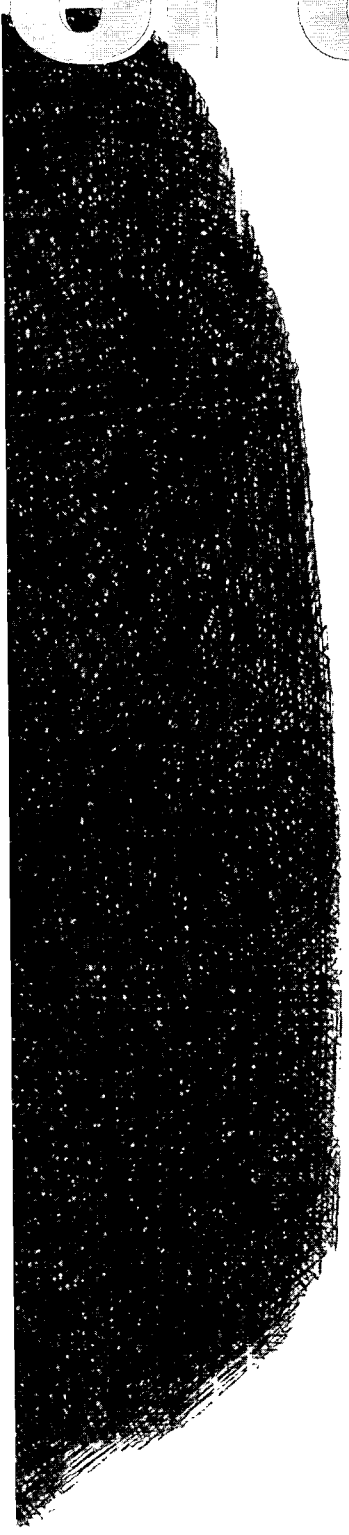

Politicians, from the president to county supervisors, spend a lot of time these days talking about children and families. But as the death of a Los Angeles toddler clearly proved, the rhetoric means little to the 90,000 California kids already caught up in the state's foster-care program.

By Bob Miller

From Congress down to the local board of supervisors, elected officials everywhere anguish over the condition of the family and the young. Congress fiddles with limits on Internet indecency, candidates denounce profane lyrics and an indifferent media, the speaker of the House of Representatives admires a benevolent "Boy's Town", and the president of the United States wants to see every child home by dinner.

The rhetoric, however, has little application to the 90,000 children already caught in the web of California's Child Welfare Services. The case of two-year-old Lance Helms in Los Angeles was especially tragic. He was murdered last year by his father's live-in girlfriend after a dependency court ordered his reunification with his father.

The fact is, most of the parents in the dependency system have committed one crime or another, drug and alcohol abuse is common, and physical violence is a regular feature

Bob Miller is a reporter for California News Service at the University of California, Berkeley, Graduate School of Journalism.

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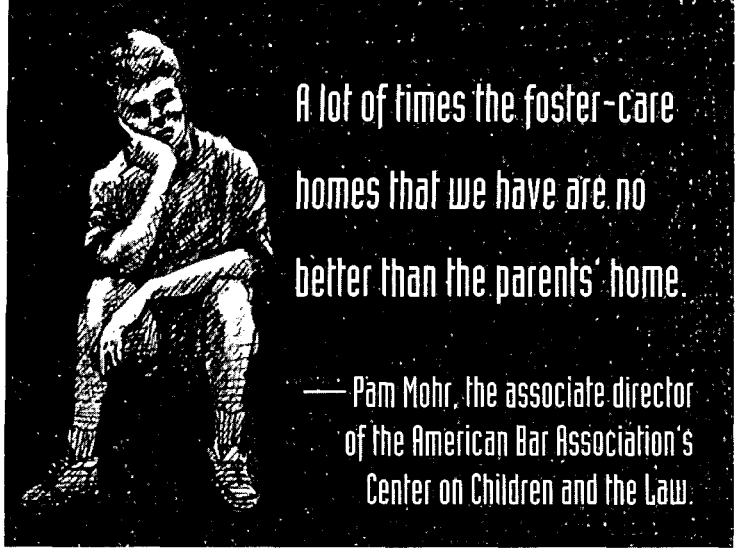

A lot of times the foster-care homes that we have are no better than the parents' home.
— Pam Mohr, the associate director of the American Bar Association's Center on Children and the Law.

of domestic life. Richard Hughes, the commissioner who ordered Lance Helms' reunification, wrote about this world after the murder. "The lawyers, judges, and social workers in our courts see and hear about a slice of life and behavior inconceivable to most people."

The potential for clear progress in this morass is remote. But Governor Pete Wilson and the state Legislature have decided to test some reforms this year, and these first tentative steps tell a lot about the intractable problems that await well-intentioned reformers.

That something has to be done is plain. The Legislative Analyst's Office issued a study of CWS in January that found failure in every imaginable corner: the incidence of child abuse, the reliance on foster care, the number of repeat placements within foster care, the rate of family reunifications, the percentage of children returning to CWS, and the overall cost of managing the unhappy system. Every single objective measure pointed in the wrong direction, with the likelihood of darker days still to come.

In 1994 there were more than 660,000 reports of child abuse and neglect in California. The cost of CWS and foster care for the 1995/96 fiscal year was around $1.7 billion, and that number ignores the related costs of courts as well as prevention, health care and adoption programs.

"These data suggest that the program has not been effective in preventing re-abuse and neglect in a significant and growing number of cases," the LAO concluded. "Reversing these trends will not be an easy task." Not easy, indeed; at any given moment, no one can even agree on the size of the foster care population, let alone the remedies for the growing numbers.

But as the government tries to control costs and improve the program, it must obey a second, even more powerful obligation — the protection of children against physical abuse. It is obviously cheaper to send a kid home than it is to house him at state expense until he reaches 18. But if going home means getting battered, then fiscal concerns lose.

California's dependency system follows a complex combination of federal rules and Supreme Court rulings. Underlying all of it is the principle of *parens patriae*, the fundamental liberty interest of parents in the care, custody and control of their children. States cannot willy-nilly take kids out of homes; they first have to satisfy some very exacting legal standards.

Under current law, county welfare departments are required to intervene in cases of child abuse or neglect to protect the child's safety. If a court considers the termination of parental rights due to the abuse, then the departments must adopt a "family reunification plan." These plans call for counseling services — usually 12 to 18 months — designed to lead to the resumption of normal family relationships.

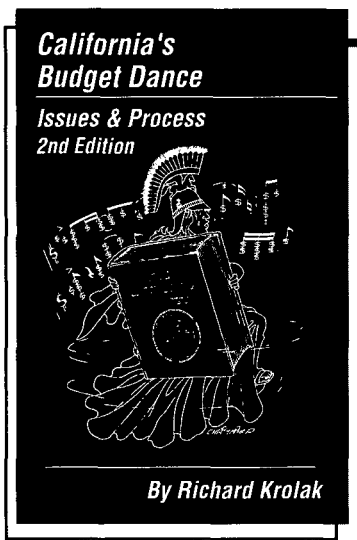
If after this counseling period the state proves by clear and convincing evidence that the parents are still a threat to the child, then the court may order termination. In other words, the abused child will always go home unless the state can prove the parents are hopelessly dangerous.

When the LAO first reported on CWS in January, it expressly endorsed the ultimate goal of family reunification. To get there safely, the LAO said, the Legislature should fund not just support services during the reunification plan, but after the child is sent home, something the counties had not been authorized to do.

This approach, while potentially costly in the near term, could theoretically improve the reunification rate (which has remained stuck at about 50 percent) in the long run, without jeopardizing the safety of the child. And, it takes into account foster-care conditions that some argue are overlooked by legislators.

"A lot of times the foster-care homes that we have are no better than the parents' home," said Pam Mohr, the associate director of the American Bar Association's Center on Children and the Law. "The politicians seem to think that if you remove the kids, then everything will be wonderful. They're wrong."

The LAO again called for improved reunification services in its February review of the governor's budget. But



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then, in the same month, Senators Richard Polanco (D-Los Angeles) and Dan Boatwright (D-Concord), introduced the Lance Helms Child Safety Act, a bill that would have turned the entire reunification system on its head.

Polanco made a direct assault on the Supreme Court's protection of parental rights. Instead of making the state prove the parents are dangerous, the bill would have made the parents prove by clear and convincing evidence that reunification was in the "best interests of the child." In other words, the abused child would never go home unless the parents could prove they were a completely safe risk.

The reaction was loud and critical. "It's a guilty until proven innocent standard," said Diane Michelsen, former president of the Academy of California Adoption Lawyers, of the original bill. "I think it's unconstitutional, and I think it's going to be a real heartburn for parents to prove."

The Senate Judiciary Committee's analysis pronounced it flatly unconstitutional and warned of ruinous consequences. "The practical effect of this change is to make it nearly impossible ever to reunify," wrote Mikki Sorensen, the staff attorney who drafted the analysis. "It is clearly the authors' intent to protect children. However, without a complete understanding of how the dependency system works as a whole, it is easy to do harm even though the intent is to do good."

Polanco withdrew the bill and tried to fashion a compromise that wouldn't step on constitutional toes. The current draft narrows the class of parents who will have to shoulder the burden to a rogues' gallery — those who have willfully abandoned their children, committed violent felonies or chronically abused drugs, to name a few.

Even for these scoundrels, it is not clear whether the bill would survive a court test. After all, one California appellate court has ruled: "While 'use a gun, go to prison' may well be an appropriate legal maxim, 'go to prison, lose your child' is not." And, in any event, the bill sits in the Appropriations Committee, where action is not expected until later in August.

Polanco's work did catch Wilson's attention, and the governor endorsed the thrust of the bill, even though it might add to the foster care population. Wilson, meanwhile, had his own idea for plotting a course out of this mine field — the Adoptions Initiative, a $7 million program designed to move 2000 kids out of state foster care each year and into adoptive families.

Wilson's budget proposed funding for 14 new positions in the state's adoption branch, together with 184 new county-level case workers. Legislative Democrats cut the funding for the state branch to about seven new staffers, but the county funding — $6.6 million from the general fund, nearly a 40 percent increase over last year — stayed intact.

In terms of a $60 billion budget, a $7 million proposal seems laughably out of proportion to all the political hand-wringing over children. But the Wilson administration has also promised to return for the next legislative session with a broad plan to address the recommendations of the LAO. And, in the end, the total budget is really not a fair yardstick; there are hard limits, both in law and in policy, that curb legislative creativity.

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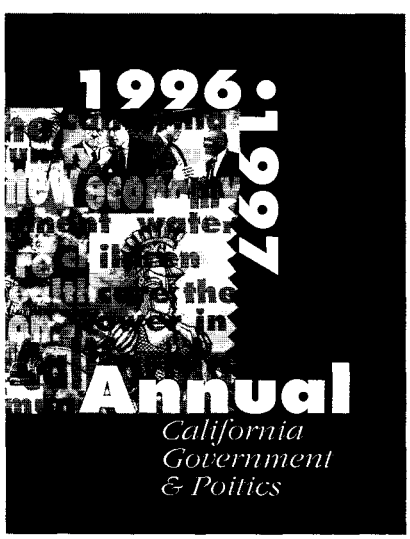

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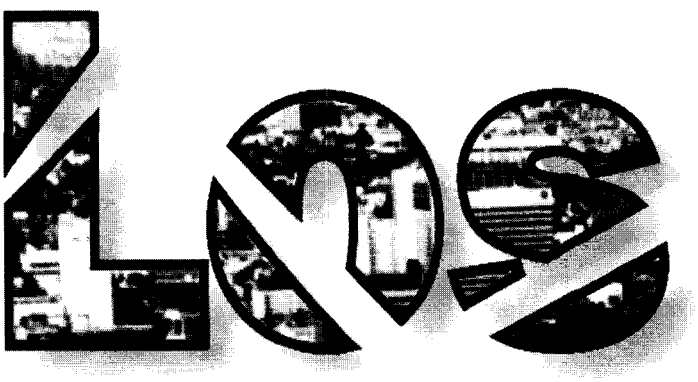
Breaking up



by Sherry Bebitch Jeffe

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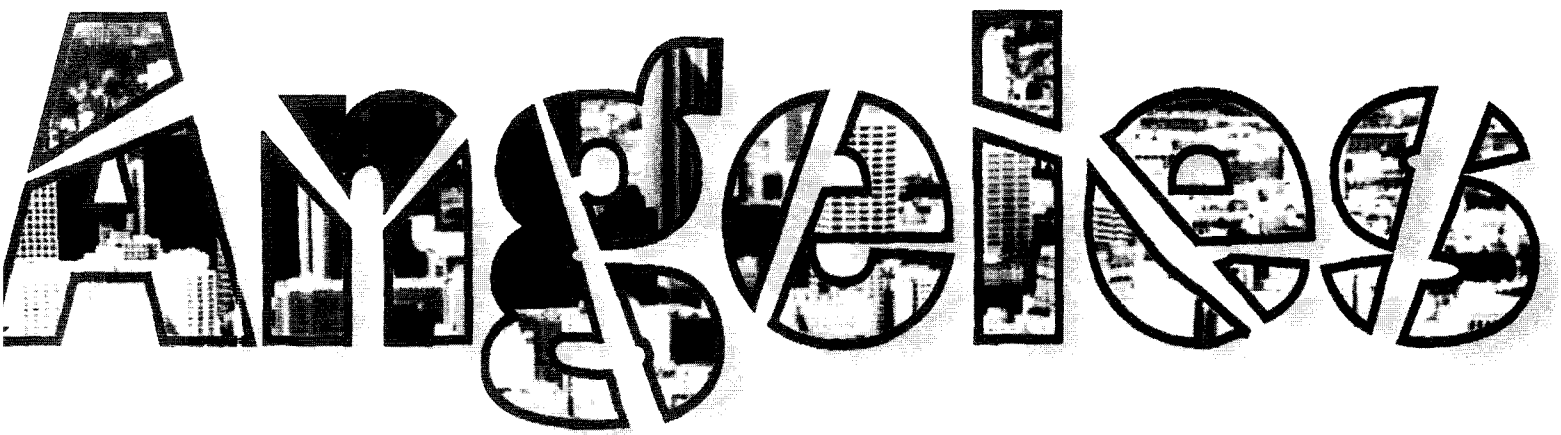
A mega city with mega problems, the state's biggest metropolis is beset by disgruntled citizens who want to shatter it into diverse pieces.



Humorist Mort Sahl once called Los Angeles "a hundred suburbs in search of a city." These days, a more apt description might be "a hundred suburbs looking to flee the city." Well, not exactly a hundred. But there are rumblings of dissatisfaction — with the size, the distance and the unresponsiveness of city government — that have led communities from the Harbor area in the south to the San Fernando Valley in the north to contemplate the idea of leaving Los Angeles.

What has triggered this flirtation with secession? Is Los Angeles fraying? Has it become too large geographically? Too unwieldy politically? Too diverse? Has government become too indulgent to some at the expense of others? Or are Angelenos just in a cranky mood?

In a word, yes. Said Los Angeles City Councilman Hal Bernson, who represents a Valley district: "I think there is an attitude problem. I don't think we think as a city any more."

Some would argue that the biggest "attitude problem" is the San Fernando Valley's. The union of "the Valley" and the City of Los Angeles was a shotgun marriage to begin with, driven by San

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Sherry Bebitch Jeffe teaches at the Claremont Graduate School and is a contributing editor to California Journal.

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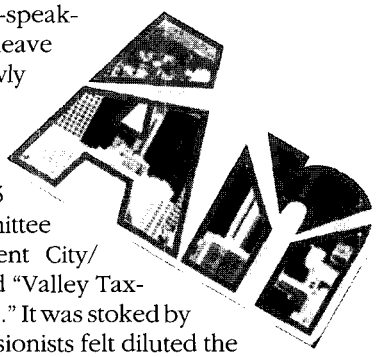
Fernando's need for water — which began flowing from the Owens Valley Project to Los Angeles in 1913. Inevitably and grudgingly, Valleyites acceded to the city's demand for annexation in exchange for water. Today, the Valley is a 222-square-mile area, separated from the rest of Los Angeles by the Santa Monica Mountains. It comprises about 35 percent of the city's population and is the heart of its "middle class."

The Valley also is home to growing agitation to seek a divorce from Los Angeles. Secession proponents argue that the Valley doesn't get the services — or the attention from distant civic leaders — it deserves. Activists have rallied around legislation (AB 2043) authored by Assemblywoman Paula Boland (R-Granada Hills) that could make it easier to secede. The bill would nullify the City Council's veto over secession and allow communities the right of "self-determination" at the ballot box. Argues Boland, "Eight people [on the Los Angeles City Council] from over the hill shouldn't control the lives of 1.3 million people." The Boland bill, however, goes beyond process to the question of what Los Angeles will become as it enters the 21st century. Will its various parts spin off into homogenous enclaves and abandon the notion of a diverse world city?

A *Los Angeles Times* Poll taken in June showed that, despite an uptick in the Los Angeles economy and a downturn in crime statistics, dissatisfaction with city government and institutions persists. Angelenos are generally pessimistic about the direction city life is taking. And the frustration and anxiety that many feel have given increased impetus to break-away talk.

Throughout history, secession movements have been driven by common themes: the desire for local control and a smaller, closer, more responsive — and less costly — government. For example, tradition has it that in 1850, the Mother Lode town of Rough and Ready declared itself a new nation in reaction to a mining tax that enraged the locals. But, said writer Charles Hillinger, the residents "soon tired of being an independent republic and after 12 weeks threw in the towel" and rejoined California and the union. More recently, secession movements have popped up in the borough of Staten Island in New York City, and in conservative, middle-class West Seattle, Washington. And last year, after decades of battling over whether the French-speaking province of Quebec should leave Canada, Quebec separatists narrowly lost a divisive referendum on independence.



The modern Valley secession movement began in 1975 with the formation of the Committee Investigating Valley Independent City/County (CIVICC), which claimed "Valley Taxpayers Don't Get Their Fair Share." It was stoked by a council redistricting that secessionists felt diluted the

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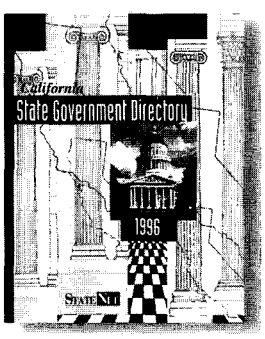

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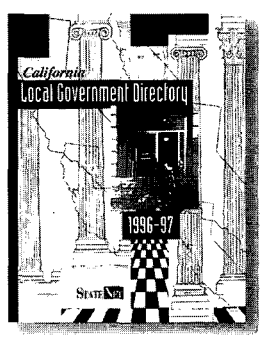

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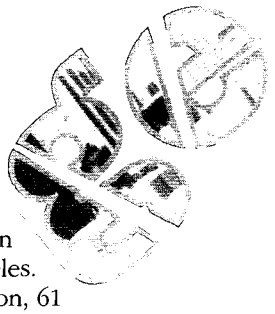
Valley's voice in City Hall, and by the threat of mandatory busing to suburban schools.

The Boland bill was first introduced three years ago but was quickly withdrawn. Faced with strong opposition by Democrats, who controlled both houses of the Legislature, Boland opted instead to concentrate on legislation to ease the way for dismantling the gargantuan Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD) — which had become a symbol of bureaucratic failure and urban deterioration. That legislation, which had its genesis in the Valley-based anti-busing movement in the 1970s, passed last year — with an assist from Senator Tom Hayden (D-Santa Monica), whose district contains pockets of the Valley. Currently, disgruntled parents and politicians throughout the city are urging the break-up of LAUSD into smaller, more locally accountable units. So far none of these break-away attempts have come to fruition. But that doesn't mean this latest debate should be ignored. It can help us understand the psyche of Los Angeles.

First of all, reports of the city's imminent geographical demise are exaggerated. Asked how they felt "in general ... about communities seceding from the city of Los Angeles," only 35 percent of the respondents to the *Times* poll supported a community's right to break away; 47 percent opposed it. And the poll indicated only "lukewarm support" for Valley secession, specifically. Even if the Boland bill were law, secession would not be a slam-dunk. The poll showed that only 45 percent of Valley residents — well below the required majority — would vote to secede if the election were held today.

Support for splitting up the city is strongest among Anglo and more affluent Angelenos — who happen to live predominantly in the Valley and on the city's upscale Westside. Opposition is greatest among African-Americans and Latinos, who are more likely to be found in the urban core of southern and central Los Angeles. On the matter of the Valley's secession, 61 percent of blacks and 56 percent of Latinos were opposed, compared with only 38 percent of the Anglos. The geographical split underscores the dynamics of race and class that infuse the issue of secession.



Valley residents, in particular, see themselves as "short-changed" by city government. And 57 percent of Valley poll respondents said they paid more in city taxes than they got back in services (only 30 percent of all respondents agreed with that perception).

It is not only the Valley secession movement that defines a discontented city tugged by class and race on issues of governance and policy. There is a parallel thrust to dismantle LAUSD that also traces its geographical roots to the Valley and shares the suburbs' anti-bureaucracy, pro-local control philosophy. Some insist the success of Boland's school district break-up bill gave new impetus to the Valley secession movement. And poll data on attitudes toward the school district break-up show similar divisions on the basis of race and class.

Among Anglos, the percentage of respondents to the

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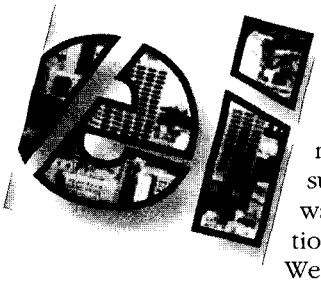


Times poll who favored dismantling LAUSD was 66 percent. Conversely, only 32 percent of African-American respondents and 35 percent of Latinos support a school district break-up. There was also greater support for decentralization among affluent respondents and Westside and Valley residents. Less well-off respondents and residents of Central and South Los Angeles were more opposed to dismantling the school system.

Equally revealing are attitudes of Angelenos toward their most visible leaders: Mayor Richard Riordan and Police Chief Willie Williams. Williams, the LAPD's first African-American chief, came on board in 1992 — in the aftermath of the Rodney King verdicts — to help heal the wounds of a divided city and restore trust and confidence in a police department under attack for racism and brutality. Early on, Williams rode high in the estimation of Los Angeles' citizens. Then a series of ethical and leadership questions began to dog him and put him at odds with Riordan and several members of the City Council.

The June poll numbers showed Williams' city-wide job approval rating (56 percent) higher than that of the mayor (46 percent) and City Council (34 percent). But both Riordan and Williams appear to be suffering from their lengthening tenure in politics and government. The mayor's job rating has slid 13 points since 1994; the chief's has tumbled 17 points (from a career high of 73 percent in 1994).

It appears the longer both men serve in a system that is seen by Angelenos as dysfunctional, the more they are perceived as part of the problem. Therefore, the less they are trusted to solve it.

Beyond a growing negativism toward their leaders, Angelenos' attitudes toward Riordan and Williams differ — yet again — by race and region. Mayor Riordan's approval rating among Anglo respondents to the *Times* poll was 60 percent, but only 30 percent among African-Americans and 34 percent among Latinos. Riordan's approval rating is highest in the affluent Westside (60 percent) and lowest (37 percent) in the inner-city south area. On the other hand, Williams' approval rating is highest among blacks (68 percent) and Latinos (62 percent) and in the urban south (65 percent) and central (64 percent) areas. It is lowest among Anglos (49 percent) and in the Valley (50 percent) and on the Westside (42 percent).

These figures suggest that the future of Williams could become a hot issue in the 1997 election year. Under police reforms enacted in response to recommendations by a citizens commission in the wake of the King beating, Williams' contract is up for renewal next year — at the end of his first five-year term. Overall public opinion is split over his rehiring, according to the *Times* poll (44 percent in favor and 43 percent opposed). However, African-Americans solidly supported Williams, with 72 percent favoring renewal and only 19 percent opposed.

What does this pattern of perception mean for the future of Los Angeles? For attempts to reinvent its government? What solutions are being offered to assuage the frustration and division highlighted by the secession debate?

Most reforms aim to blunt the impact of Boland's bill and keep the city intact. "Neighborhood" — as in control, empowerment, governance — appears to be the operative buzzword. In his annual State of the City address last April, Riordan called for a "neighborhood convention" that would bring residents from throughout Los Angeles together to discuss their concerns and expectations. "It is up to the neighborhoods to solve their problems," Riordan said.

Riordan borrowed his plan from Valley Councilman Joel Wachs, who first proposed it during his unsuccessful run for mayor in 1993. In the wake of renewed interest in Valley secession, Wachs has refloated his proposal, which would create 103 "neighborhood councils" to advise the city's elected officials on matters ranging from planning decisions to community policing. The nebulous plan is already being attacked by some Valley activists as unresponsive to demands for more local control over government decisions.

Hayden has entered the fray with his own proposal "to decentralize power throughout Los Angeles to neighborhood levels" through "democratically elected neighborhood representatives taking part in decisions concerning zoning, growth and the environment." A charter amendment incorporating his plan would be placed on the city ballot next year — just in time to offer Hayden a convenient platform for a possible mayoral run.

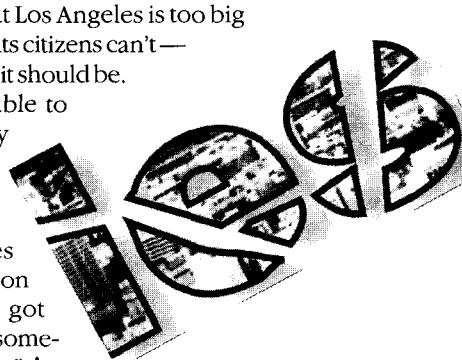
Another Valley councilman, Arthur Alarcon, has suggested examining other alternatives to Valley secession, including the "charter school model" of local control over decision-making and the creation of community improvement districts to allow a community to raise "revenue that can only be used in that community."

Councilman Mike Feuer, whose district straddles the Santa Monica Mountains, has embraced a proposal by a group of influential Valley business organizations, community and civic leaders for a Charter Reform Commission to revise Los Angeles' 71-year-old, 694-page charter. The citizens' group would be empowered to garner public opinion on restructuring city government and then create a new charter to be put on the ballot for voter approval.

City Council members appear to be embracing this plan. After all, it could take at least three years to complete the process — long enough for them to defer difficult decisions and wait for term limits to kick in or the political winds to shift.

The reforms that have come out of the current secession debate may address geographic distance between citizens and their government. But they do little to address the chasms of class and race that separate Los Angeles communities. In the dispersion of governance to the city's neighborhoods, there is further potential for balkanization.

The "quick fixes" and palliatives that have begun to surface in the wake of the Boland bill offer no silver bullet that will end the frustration, anxiety, alienation and divisiveness that mark life and governance for many Angelenos. In the end, the risk is not that Los Angeles is too big or too unwieldly. It is that its citizens can't — or won't — agree on what it should be. And that its leaders, unable to muster consensus, simply continue to punt.



Perhaps the most chilling insight into the psyche of Los Angeles came at a Valley meeting on the Boland bill. "We got money and they don't," someone growled. "Screw 'em."

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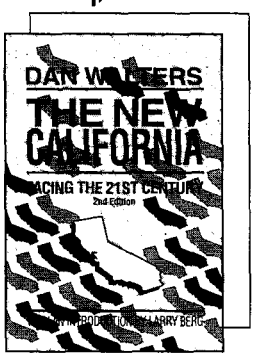

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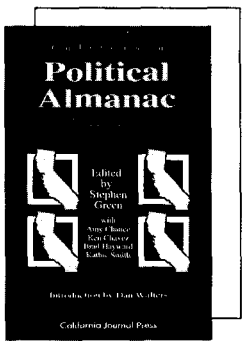

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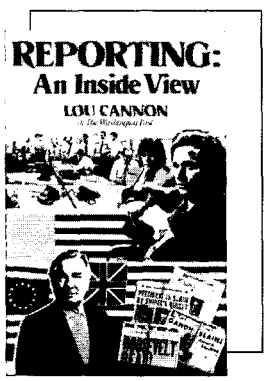

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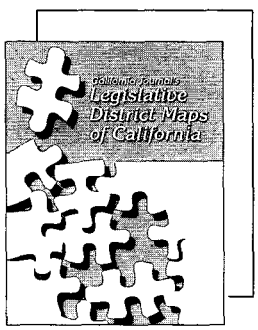

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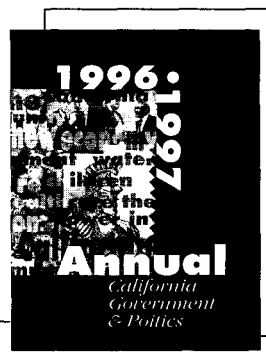

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The GOP

By Francine Phillips

Illustration by Christopher

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descends on San Diego

Republicans are coming to San Diego en masse this month for a convention that offers a bright spotlight on one of the party's rising political stars — Mayor Susan Golding.

Three years ago, when Susan Golding started working to get the Republican National Committee to consider San Diego as the site for its 1996 presidential nominating convention, she thought she might be a candidate for governor of California in 1998. Local wisdom saw a San Diego convention as the culmination of Pete Wilson's quest for the GOP presidential nomination and a natural backdrop for passing his gubernatorial mantle to Golding. It sounded like a fairy tale. It looked like a fairy tale.

It was a fairy tale.

Wilson's presidential effort imploded soon after liftoff this spring, but Golding only changed her timetable. If Wilson was not going to be plucked from Sacramento mid-term to become president, all the better. After all, had Wilson gone off to Washington, Democratic Lieutenant Governor Gray Davis would have moved into the Capitol's corner office. Thus, instead of a wide-open gubernatorial race in 1998, Golding — or any other Republican hopeful — would have faced an incumbent Democratic governor. With Wilson termed out in 1998, the governorship still

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Francine Phillips is a freelance writer from San Diego and the author of several books. She also was affiliated with the San Diego Host Committee.

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seemed a likely goal.

Susan Golding first came into political focus in 1984 when she battled Lynn Schenk for a seat on the San Diego Board of Supervisors. Although the two women shared similarities — both married to rich, powerful men, for instance — their contest was so fierce that Schenk sued Golding for libel, winning a $150,000 judgment.

By the time Susan Golding was ready to run for mayor in 1992, she had been a standout on a board more known for its arguments than its accomplishments. In addition, her personal life had fallen apart when her then-husband, former Jerry Brown Director of Finance Richard Silberman, was indicted and sent to prison in a money laundering scheme. Nonetheless, her political star was rising. Her mayoral opponent, Peter Navarro, was a longtime political wannabe who ran a viscious campaign. Golding, on the other hand, stuck to the high road and won.

San Diego's prospects at the time were good. The only industry in recession mode was real estate, and the term "downsizing" had not been coined. Golding's inauguration party was like a prom for grown ups — rock and roll music and grazing stations on the terrace of the new debt-free Convention Center overlooking San Diego Bay.

Fast forward four years. Downsizing is practically its own industry in San Diego. The famous Top Gun Navy pilots have flown off to Fallon, Nevada, of all places. General Dynamics has laid off thousands of workers. And a local radio talk show has endowed the mayor with a theme song, "Wake Up, Little Susie."

Yet Golding has been able to muster an attitude in San Diego as a town that is vital, growing and on the verge of a surge. She won re-election in the '96 March primary, avoiding a runoff by garnering nearly 80 percent of the vote against five other candidates. Defense conversion is changing surveillance satellites into soil monitors. Laser technology is turning into skin-care treatment. The new Hall of Justice is open. Jack Murphy Stadium is expanding, the convention center is expanding, the airport is expanding and the new main library is finalizing its design concept. A report was just completed that recommends a new government center be built on the site of the current City Hall. Other proposals involved an area for recreation and housing where the Naval Training Center is scheduled to be abandoned, and connecting the bays. When the going gets tough, the tough go shopping.

Orange County, one of the wealthiest counties in California, was caught short because of risky investments and had to declare bankruptcy. In the process, it was disclosed that most of the public assets had been mortgaged to the hilt. Counties across the state were scurrying to protect their assets. Leaders in San Diego said, "Why didn't we think of that?"

In the middle of all this sits Golding, who has not been a tax-and-spend politician but has become a borrow-and-spend politician. The problem for some of her constituents — several of whom have sued her administration over its borrowing — lies in the fact that the plan is based on revenue bonds backed by shaky revenues. Also, revenue bonds do not require voter approval, and that prospect also is being challenged in the courts. There are personal risks for Golding in increasing regional debt by more than $2.5 billion, as well as potential payoffs down the line.

The same has been said about the Republican National Convention.

Golding herself admitted, "There is no way to tell what the convention will mean to me, personally. But what I do know is that it will be a great benefit to the City of San Diego. A $160 million economic benefit, we know. There will also be a somewhat intangible benefit of the international exposure that San Diego will get."

Cynthia Vicknair, a former Golding chief of staff, puts it more succinctly. "Susan Golding made this convention happen in San Diego — against all odds. She is clearly one of the leading women of the Republican Party and this is a make or break chance to get national recognition."

What has to go well? Just about everything. Transportation has to move like clockwork — plans call for shuttles leaving every hotel every eight minutes. Communication has to be simple — digital, wireless technology will make its California debut at the Republican National Convention as Pac Bell Paging, the National Dispatch Center and Arch Communications Group expect to handle 225,000 calls from donated phones. The parties have to be enjoyable; now that the San Diego Zoo nixed the opening night party, volunteers are scrambling to host 55 separate events for the delegations. Protests have to be non-disruptive — shifting of the official protest area has raised its own set of protests. The party has to unite, something even the most meticulous micro-management cannot guarantee.

Just as Golding hasn't trusted the voters to pass her bond proposals, she's failing to trust the city to be supportive of the convention. The books have been closed to public scrutiny; according to the *San Diego Union Tribune*, "shrouded." Estimates of the convention's cost to San Diego run between $23 million and $30 million. The San Diego Host Committee has raised $12 million in cash and $6 million in donated services. And if anyone knows exactly how much has been spent and how much more is needed, they're not telling.

A longtime observer of things San Diego said, "It would make more sense for Golding to reach out to the city, gather the support of the populace." In other words, why not say, "Hey everybody! Let's put on a show!" San Diegans have always responded to that kind of leadership. But by keeping her cards close to the deck, by micro-managing the show, by trying to control every aspect of the event, Golding is laying herself open to the kind of criticism that has begun to surface in San Diego in such venues as the *Union Tribune*. She risks making the mistake of looking like it's all about her and her career, no matter how much she denies it publicly.

Tim Chelling, former Wilson editorial aide, former editorial director of KNSD - TV in San Diego and longtime political commentator analyzed Golding's position as this: "Obviously, as the host mayor at a convention, Golding can use the welcoming address as a launching platform for a lot of things. It's a real opportunity to shine nationally, and I'm sure Susan and everyone around her is aware of that. Where it will take her is not that important. They are going to program the missile after it's launched. But the first step is to get it off the

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launching pad. I think she's praying for Wilson to get a political appointment, which would be good for both of them. Pete Wilson still gets to make the call and deserves to do so."

For Golding, the convention means exposure, exposure, exposure - for her personna and for her organizational talents. It also means getting up close and personal with people around the country who can help her political career. "Her biggest advantage has been flying around the county meeting CEO's and others with access to money," said Vicknair. "With the newly passed open primary in California, Golding has got to be out there taking risks."

She is. If all goes as planned, Golding's involvement in the convention will be a crowning achievement to her terms of office as mayor. She went after the convention and got it. San Diego has responded with enthusiasm, which it always does to any big event. The weather will be perfect, the hotels accommodating, the transportation flawless and the citizens of San Diego will be gracious. If Golding has her way, it's going to be fun.

For Golding, the worst case scenario is that she will be known as the mayor of a beautiful, city that has no money but whose streets were crowded with protesters. The best-case scenario is that thousands of people across the United States will know firsthand that Susan Golding is capable, committed and can deliver the goods. Whether it be Governor Golding or Senator Golding or something else, it may be worth the risk.

Rostrum letters

Assembly races

How could *California Journal* publish an article about Assembly races (see July 1996) and not mention the effect of the 1991 reapportionment on the membership of the Legislature? American government is republican in form, and screwing up representative districts by gerrymandering screws up American government. The article does not recognize how the 1991 reapportionment explains the Legislature's present membership. This is gross ignorance of the key principles upon which American government is built. Gerrymandering destroys the principle that representative districts must have geographical and economic reasons for being to ensure that the people who live in them are motivated to work together as communities. I wonder if you know what you are doing when you so poorly understand an issue that you leave out an essential element.

WILLIAM JOHN VALENTINE
Long Beach

Malcolm Lucas

Your article on former Chief Justice Malcolm Lucas (see July 1996) never mentions the "c" word, but the *San Francisco Chronicle* reported in November 1993 that Lucas has "accepted trips to overseas conferences paid by the insurance industry groups that have filed petitions with the court" and that he "chose not to comment directly on ethical questions raised by his travels." The paper also noted that the canons of the California Code of Judicial Conduct state that "a judge may receive compensation and reimbursement for expenses ... if the source of such payments does not give the appearance of impropriety" and that "the source of the payment must not raise any question of undue influence on the judge's ability or willingness to be impartial." When the *Journal* tells us that the Lucas court "restricted suits against insurers," it should have added that Lucas had been the beneficiary of insurance industry largess, which certainly raises questions frowned upon by the code. The *Journal* was asleep at the switch.

GILBERT BENDIX
Kensington

Initiatives

Your article on November initiatives (see July 1996) contained a serious misstatement with regard to the two measures that have qualified on the subject of campaign-finance reform. First, the "perennials" includes the American Association of Retired Persons, one of four co-sponsoring organizations with the League of Women Voters, Common Cause and United We Stand. AARP has been active in campaign reform in California since the Watergate era. We were an active participant in passing Proposition 68 in June 1988 and active in attempting to get it implemented during the Proposition 73/Supreme Court debacle. Through March 31st, AARP was the largest single cash contributor to the CPRI effort and has a volunteer cadre of personnel who will be working on the campaign until November.

Second, the article states that the two campaign-reform measures are similar, with differences occuring largely in degree and approach — a statement well off the mark. CPRI was being crafted by five organizations (including CalPIRG) until one (CalPIRG) left due to differences in basic philosophy. The current coalition wanted a law that could be implemented because it had passed constitutional muster elsewhere. CalPIRG wanted to take on the Supreme Court and admitted that it would take a minimum of a decade to work their initiative through the courts. Third, the CalPirg initiative repeals the Ethics in Government laws, thereby eliminating any limit on contributions in the form of gifts to politicians — something not mentioned in their literature or in the ballot title and summary.

ROBERT HOLUB
Co-chairman, AARP CPRI Steering Committee
Orangevale

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Gearing up

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for 1998

Democratic U.S. Senator Barbara Boxer is considered vulnerable when she seeks re-election in two years, and a host of Republicans is just now beginning to focus on taking advantage of the situation.

By Kathleen Les and A.G. Block

Trivia question: What do the Republican trio of George Bush, Pete Wilson and Sonny Bono have in common?

Answer: Each played a significant role in helping to elect Barbara Boxer to the U.S. Senate in 1992.

Think about it.

• Bush was seeking a second term as president in 1992, but his campaign decided early on that it could not compete in California. Before Labor Day, Bush effectively disappeared from the Golden State, leaving a financial and psychological void at the top of the ticket and making it easier for Democrats to win election.

• Wilson was in the middle of his first term as governor, having narrowly defeated former San Francisco Mayor Dianne Feinstein in 1990. Before taking over as chief executive, however, Wilson had to resign from his previous job — in the U.S. Senate — thus setting the stage for both of California's Senate seats to be up for grabs in 1992.

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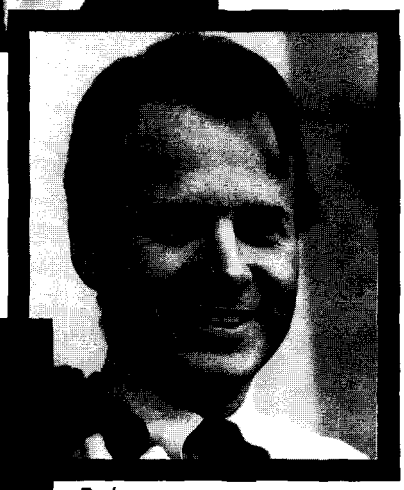
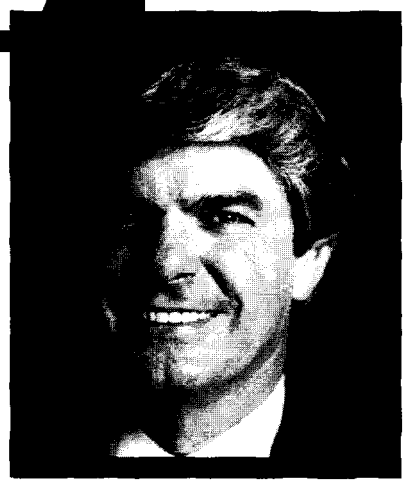
Federal law required that Wilson's appointed successor stand for election at the first available statewide election, which just happened to coincide with the end of the six-year term for the seat held by Democrat Alan Cranston, who was retiring. Not only that, Feinstein — the best-known Democrat in California thanks to her narrow loss to Wilson — rushed in to run for Wilson's old seat. In the process of trouncing GOP appointee John Seymour, Feinstein graciously campaigned in tandem with Boxer, raising Boxer's profile during the crucial last weeks before the election.

Golding

• Finally, there is Bono, the former mayor of Palm Springs who looked to further his political ambitions in '92 by reaching for the U.S. Senate. In the Republican primary that year, Bono was a novelty act alongside the two main contenders — Palo Alto Congressman Tom Campbell and Los Angeles television commentator Bruce Herschensohn. Herschensohn beat Campbell by a mere 6000 votes out of more than two million cast on the GOP side. But Bono diverted nearly 400,000 of those votes into his own bag, and many observers believe that his 17 percent of the vote came *mostly at the expense of* Campbell. Those same analysts also believe that the moderate Campbell may have knocked off the left-leaning Boxer. The conservative Herschensohn, on the other hand, favored offshore oil drilling, opposed any form of gun control, wanted to keep spending zillions on defense and was anti-abortion — all positions woefully out of step with most California voters. Herschensohn began the contest 20 points behind Boxer in most polls, and although he ran a spirited and aggressive campaign, he could not overcome the Feinstein-Boxer tag team.


Dreier

Fong


Lewis

Two years hence, Boxer will face voters once again, and she likely will not be able to count on more "help" from Republicans. As in 1992, however, she will take to the hustings in an eventful year, for 1998 will feature wide-open contests for the state's most sought-after constitutional offices — governor and attorney general. In addition, every other constitutional officer must stand for election. And there likely will be a smattering — or flood — of controversial initiatives gracing the ballot. Finally, barring a court order, 1998 will be the first year to feature an open primary election, with the results anyone's guess.

Into this soup drops the Boxer re-election effort, already perhaps hampered by history. Since 1938, no incumbent senator has won re-election if that lawmaker's party had controlled the presidency for the preceding six years.

The first time she ran for the post, Boxer was a little-known member of the state's congressional delegation, a six-term liberal from upscale Marin County north of San Francisco. Short on substantive accomplishments, her most significant moment came not in the Capitol but in front of it when she and a handful of female colleagues stormed up the steps of the Senate to complain about the way the upper house was handling the Supreme Court confirmation hearings of Clarence Thomas. It was vintage Boxer — feisty, no-nonsense, outspoken and ever the champion of women's rights.

Since her election to the Senate, Boxer has faced some bouts of unfortunate timing. During her first two years, she took a back seat to Feinstein, who was showcased by majority Democrats in anticipation of a tough re-election fight in 1994. For the past two years, Boxer has served in a house dominated by Republicans. Her job performance has been rated "fair to middling" in most polls. And although she now has represented California in Congress for 14 years, Boxer's image remains vague and ill-defined. Many voters regard her as a one-dimensional "liberal." Although seen as passionate, says one Democratic activist, she ultimately must demonstrate an ability to get something through the Senate that makes a difference for California. And she still needs an issue to call her own, the way Feinstein has co-opted gun control and the assault-weapon ban, the activist notes.

Recent poll numbers are not great for Boxer either. For instance, a July Field Poll showed that only 34 percent of those asked were inclined to vote for her re-election. Nearly half — 48 percent — were not inclined to give Boxer a second term. Worse, 29 percent of Democrats fell into the latter category, while less than half of Democrats — again, 48 percent — backed her re-election. In political terms, these numbers spell "vulnerable" and put Boxer near the top of the Republicans' national hit list for 1998.

"Republicans are crazy not to go after her seriously," says GOP consultant Ray McNally of Sacramento. "She is absolutely beatable."

But who will wield the GOP club?

An informal survey of GOP consultants and political observers has fleshed out a list of potential contenders, although none actually has declared his or her candidacy and few other than Boxer are even willing to talk about the possibility of running in an election one political light year

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removed from the current campaign. But it may not be too early for any candidate to be thinking about the race, for those who do run will need to spend the next 24 months raising a lot of money, both for what promises to be a crowded primary and for a hotly contested general election.

One candidate who has taken himself off the list at the outset is Hershensohn, whose 600,000-vote loss to Boxer in 1992 marked his second unsuccessful try for the Senate. He also lost the 1986 GOP primary to former Congressman Ed Zschau (R-Saratoga). "It was my life's ambition to be in the U.S. Senate, and I tried and failed to get elected," says Hershensohn, who now is affiliated with the Claremont Institute. He insists that he will not try again.

As for those who may try, any list must begin with Wilson, who will be looking for a job in 1998. Those close to Wilson insist that he is not interested in returning to the Senate. But some also hedge their bets. After all, the governor has displayed ample evidence over the past two years that he would like to return to Washington, D.C., although to the other end of Pennsylvania Avenue from the Capitol — namely, the White House.

"I don't sense that [Wilson] is running," says GOP consultant Sal Russo. "It's easier to seek the presidency by not being in public office, and he'd be better off not tied down to the Senate."

But Russo and others say that Wilson's future is tied to the fortunes of the current GOP presidential nominee — Bob Dole. If Dole wins the presidency, he likely will foreclose on Wilson's dream of running for president in 2000, and that may prompt the ever-restless governor to run for the Senate. But if Dole loses in November, the presidency becomes wide open in 2000, and Wilson may pass on the Senate to concentrate on the big enchilada.

Even if Wilson does decide to run for the Senate, he likely will not be able to clear the GOP field. First of all, history would not be on his side. Since World War II, only two sitting governors have made a run for the Senate — Republican Goodwin Knight in 1958 and Democrat Jerry Brown in 1982. Both were clobbered, Brown by Wilson himself. The last governor to successfully leap from the statehouse to the Senate was Progressive Hiram Johnson back in 1916.

Still, Wilson is not the only ambitious Republican on the roster of constitutional officers. Treasurer Matt Fong — son of former Democratic Secretary of State March Fong Eu — says he is very interested in taking on Boxer. Fong demonstrated both fund-raising and vote-getting prowess in 1994 when he blew past former Democratic Party Chairman Phil Angelides to win the treasurer's job.

"I've been getting encouraged by electeds, supporters and friends," he says, adding that he would not challenge Wilson, should the governor enter the Senate fray. And should Lungren somehow not run for governor, Fong says he would throw his hat into that ring.

"[Fong] has a good story to tell," says McNally. "He has a national fund-raising base in the Asian community and has almost $1 million in the bank, with no debt." Russo characterized Fong as "extraordinarily strong, with a good way about him."

Secretary of State Bill Jones also has been mentioned as bringing impressive credentials to the race. Jones himself says

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he is keeping his options open at this point but seems inclined to run for re-election. "I haven't ruled anything out," he says. "But I didn't take the secretary of state's job as a stepping stone." Jones says his decision whether to seek the U.S. Senate will depend "on the election climate" at the time.

Both Jones and Fong face the same dilemma in 1998: for both, a race for the U.S. Senate would be up-or-out since each must face re-election. The same holds true for Insurance Commissioner Charles Quackenbush, whose name also has surfaced as a potential contender for the Senate. Quackenbush, however, has said he is not interested in anything but re-election.

Cox

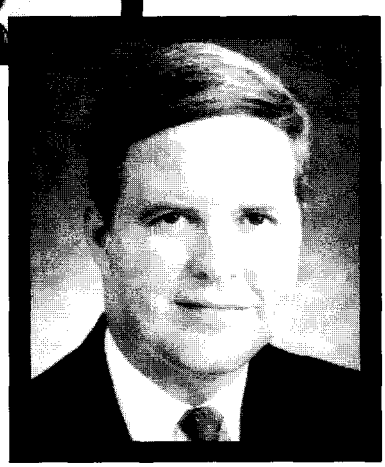
The state's congressional delegation, too, may produce a platoon of GOP contenders. Those most often mentioned are David Dreier (R-Covina), Christopher Cox (R-Newport Beach), Jerry Lewis (R-Redlands) and Campbell, although Campbell's campaign manager says to count him out since he's relishing the opportunity to "make a major contribution in the House." Campbell could be counted back in, however, if Democrats regain control of the House this fall. Bono, too, could make another stab at the office. For all hopefuls from the House, it is up-or-out.

Jones

Bono

Cox' political profile has been raised substantially of late, thanks to his frequent mention as a potential vice-presidential candidate with Dole. Not yet challenged as a fund raiser but with impeccable conservative credentials, he hails from GOP ground zero — Orange County — always a plus in statewide Republican primaries.

The more moderate Lewis doesn't enjoy Cox' base since he represents an inland, Riverside County district. And except for having a famous namesake, he is virtually unknown despite having spent nearly 30 years in elective office. Lewis, a senior member of the House Appropriations Committee, and Cox, chairman of the House Republican Policy Committee, both say they will wait until after the '96 election to explore options for 1998.


Campbell

Dreier, on the other hand, expresses no such reticence. He says he is very seriously thinking of running against Boxer. A power in the Republican-dominated House, Dreier currently serves as vice-chairman of the House Rules Committee and heads the House Task Force on California. A conservative, his campaign treasury exceeds $2 million — good seed money for a run at the Senate. Like Fong, Dreier says he has been encouraged to run by influential Republicans both in California and in Washington. "My priority now," he says, "is to maintain a [GOP] majority in the House and Senate." He'll decide about 1998 this December.

And then, there is the most intriguing Republican of all, one most observers agree would give Boxer her toughest fight — San Diego Mayor Susan Golding. Mediagenic and pro-choice, Golding has a strong fund-raising base and is said to be the choice of both Dole and Wilson. It also is expected that her name identification — and her political fortunes — will be given a substantial boost this month when she serves as official major domo for the Republican National Convention, to be held in her home city. Golding also neutralizes Boxer on many social issues, especially abortion.

For her part, Golding is being coy. Adviser Tom Sheppard says that the mayor has been contacted by a number of prominent Republicans about running either for the Senate or for governor. But, he says, "I don't believe she's considering [a statewide race] right now." Sheppard adds that Golding's reputation is "on the line" with the convention and "if she does the best job now, her political future will take care of itself."

Meanwhile, the target of all this speculation bides her time, confident that she will not be forced to defend herself in a primary. Even in uncertain political times, made more frantic by legislative term limits, no one has offered the name of any Democrat willing to tackle Boxer in the primary. "I don't see anyone having the guts to do it," said one veteran Democratic campaign consultant.

And Democrats say that poll watchers who pick through the bones of recent surveys for evidence of Boxer's demise may be premature in their assessments. "Those counting her out don't know her," says veteran Democratic consultant David Townsend. "She works three times harder than anyone else and she can outrun anyone campaigning, fund raising and doing her job as a senator."

And Boxer herself concedes nothing.

"In every election I've run in, Republicans have said I'm out of sync with the voters," she says. Boxer wants to define herself as a fighter who stands up to special interests and who goes to bat for the environment, for education and for individual rights. "That I'm a big spend-and-tax liberal is the old line, out-of-date criticism that keeps being made," she says. "But I will present my record."

Republicans will try to present a less-flattering portrait of Boxer. What they would very much *not* like to do is give her the kind of hand-up that helped her win election in the first place. For Republicans in 1998, luck does not have to be a lady.

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Two Cents commentary

A nation of Johnny Roccos?

Everytime I'm asked if my son will follow in my footsteps and become a writer or journalist, my standard response has been: "Actually, I want him to be a violin maker."

I am kidding. Well, half kidding, for I really want my son to have contentment — which I have come to equate with crafting a musical instrument that brings joy and enrichment into the world. Like every parent, I want my son to have a good "quality of life." But like every parent, I struggle to define just what that means in a world governed by speed, technology and a seemingly endless hunger for wealth and celebrity.

Over the past few months, however, I've run across several stories that helped bring into focus the meaning of "quality of life." The first was an article in the *Orange County Register* about a man from Lake Forest named Joe Hammalian, who recently died at age 89. Hammalian, a lifelong bachelor who lived alone in a mobile home, spent his days cutting out patterns for a Los Angeles dress maker.

At night and on weekends, Hammalian made violins. Terrific violins, according to the noted musicians who had played them. It is estimated that he crafted fewer than 100 violins during his lifetime, and although they sold for as much as $15,000 each, his small home was crammed with 47 instruments when he died. They had remained unsold simply because he could not bear to part with them.

Hammalian, the article pointed out, was meticulous, studying books about violins, traveling to Europe and Asia to buy only the finest woods, then aging the wood for as long as 10 years before using it. Shy, diffident, almost reclusive, Joe Hammalian nevertheless was a man of great passion. But it was passion for a hobby rather than for a profession, for, as the article noted, Hammalian had turned down the chance to own a violin shop. His craving, if it be called that, was not for celebrity or wealth but for satisfaction — and for the joy of having created beauty out of knots of wood. Although he lived modestly, Joe Hammalian's life had been remarkable.

The second story was one of those folksy little video essays that often pop up on PBS' nightly The News Hour with Jim Lehrer. It centered on a barber from a small town in central Kansas who, although well into his 90s, still cut hair in the small shop he had established in the 1920s. And he still charged only a dollar.

But the point of the essay was not to call attention to an elderly barber who cut hair for a dollar. It was to celebrate a local folk hero, for this barber also provided a vital service to his neighbors: He made window screens. As the essayist noted, many rural houses are built catch-as-catch-can, without blueprints and without standardized doors and windows. So, if flies and other pests are to be kept on the outside of open windows and doors on brutal summer evenings, the screens and screen doors must be handcrafted to order.

And that is what this barber has done — for more than 60 years. Rural Kansas is dotted with thousands upon thousands of screens nailed together in a workshop adjacent to the clapboard house he calls home. He lives as many do in the rural Midwest — on the verge of poverty and without much in the way of material possessions. But he also seems to have lived a contented life after having provided his neighbors with an invaluable benefit, one he can see by traveling almost anywhere in central Kansas.

And then, the third story, appearing last month in every major newspaper in the country: Margaux Hemingway, 41, dead of unknown causes in a Santa Monica apartment.

I spent most of the 1970s in Ketchum, Idaho, and for a time, Margaux Hemingway was the town's most famous native. And for a time, she seemed to have it all — glamour, wealth, celebrity, youth, beauty. She signed a $1 million modeling contract to tout a perfume called "Babe;" made her movie debut in a snorer called "Lipstick," which also debuted her now-more-famous sister, Mariel; and was celebrated in chic-chic circles from New York to Paris to Los Angeles. Plus, she was a Hemingway — granddaughter of Ketchum's most-famous-ever resident. Her career eventually derailed on substance abuse during the 1980s, and just before her death, she had tried to revive it with a photo spread in *Playboy*.

Margaux Hemingway's life never lacked for quantity, yet ultimately, the wealth and celebrity and glamour seemed to bring very little in the way of contentment. It brought riches, but never enrichment. In the end, I doubt she ever knew the kind of satisfaction that Joe Hammalian must have felt every time he listened to one of his violins, or that a Kansas barber understands whenever he passes a house made more secure and comfortable by his screens.

Yet in America these days, the life that is admired is that of Margaux Hemingway, filled as it was with glitz and perhaps little else. We seem to believe that a quality life is a life of the moment, one dedicated to grabbing off more of whatever. Perhaps we have always been this way; if so, we have become a nation of Johnny Roccos.

Who is Johnny Rocco?

Soldier: "He knows what he wants. Don't you, Rocco?"

Rocco (confident): "Sure ..."

Old Man: "What's that?"

Soldier: "Tell him, Rocco."

Rocco (confused, hesitant): "Well, I want ..."

Soldier: "He wants more. Don't you, Rocco?"

Rocco (suddenly animated): "Yeah! That's right. More. That's right. I want more."

Old Man: "Will you ever get enough?"

Soldier: "Will you, Rocco?"

Rocco (confident again): "Never have. No. I guess I won't."

That scene — from John Huston's 1948 film, "Key Largo" — is a metaphor for modern America. Like Rocco, we strut confidently about, certain of our destiny and our power. But asked to explain our goals, we become confused. We're not sure, in any concrete way, what we want out of life.

Except we want more.

More never did anything for Margaux Hemingway.

— A.G. Block

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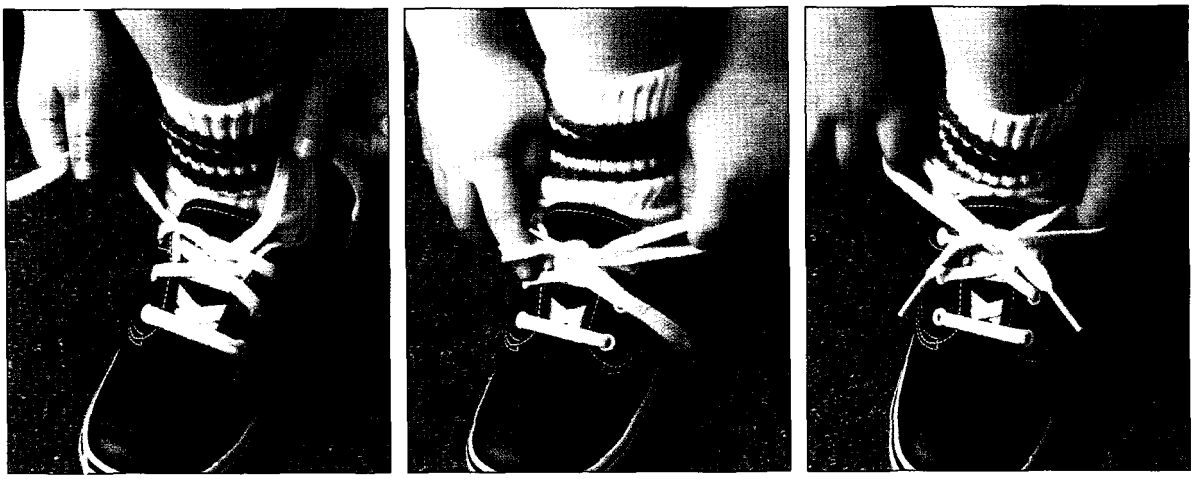

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